

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Choose Joy **Mary Lenaburg**

Hello my friends. Welcome. My name is Mary Lenaburg, and I'm so happy to be with you today. We're going to be talking about choosing joy, but first I want to bring our Lady into our time together and ask her to bless this talk and our time. So we're going to say the Hail Mary. So please join me in praying. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As I said, my name's Mary Lenaburg, and this talk is called "Choose Joy", and you might be wondering why we're talking about joy during Lent. Well, it's a joyful season. I realize it's a penitential season in the church, but it's also a season in which we experience the love of our Lord as we prepare to go through the Triduum of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. So it's an opportunity for us to give alms, to pray, and to repent. To have penance. And so I offer this talk to you as an encouragement during this time to choose joy.

I've been married for 28 years, I'm the mother of 2, and one of my children, my daughter Courtney is a special needs... or was a special needs child. She had seizure disorder, cerebral palsy, a brain injury at some time, either in utero or sometime after, we're not really sure. But she suffered a great deal throughout her life here on earth for the 22 years God still blessed us with her. And I learned during that time with her how to choose joy. There were many sufferings and difficulties that came to us, that came to our family, and during this time of caring for our daughter, but God sort of revealed to me in prayer and through the example of the saints on how to have sort of a gratitude of attitude. No. To have an attitude of gratitude. See? There you go. An attitude of gratitude. So to take all things to Him in joy, in prayer and supplication.

So what does that mean, to choose joy? Well, the saint that I followed, took the lead from on this was St. Therese of Lisieux. And so they call her "The Little Flower. She was a Carmelite nun who lived in France in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and she had a difficult childhood. She was kind of rather a spoiled brat, shall we say. And she had kind of a conversion at the age of 14, a deep conversion, and chose at that point to change her ways and to offer herself and her life up to the

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Lord. She entered the convent, and she chose what she called “The Little way”, to bring herself before the Lord as a small child so that every little offering she made would bring Him joy.

Think of a small child in your life, whether it be your own child, or nieces, nephews, grandchildren, children at church, when they pick up that little dandelion flower, the little yellow flower, and they bring it to you, and “Oh, momma, Oh miss Mary, look what I gave you. Look. This is for you. I love you.” And it’s a weed, and you’re just looking at it, but all you see is the joy on their face, and you know “This is done with love.” That’s how St. Therese kind of looked at her life. So I’m going to start with a quote of hers to kind of put this in context, and then give you some kind of practical examples on how to choose joy. I apologize, I’m battling a cold, so bear with me. She said “Prayer is an aspiration of the heart. It is a simple glance directed to heaven. It is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy.”

So, the first thing Therese did was pray, and through her daily prayers she would offer these little trials and tribulations up to the Lord. She would glance toward heaven and speak with her heart, and share her life with the Lord as a small child, like a small child. She had difficulty with some other nuns, difficulties in her life. She was not a very strong person physically, so she had a hard time carrying out these large physical tasks that were required of her in the convent. But she would seek them out. She would seek out to do the lowest work. The scrubbing of the floors, the ironing of the cloths, anything that she could do that other nuns wouldn’t want to do, you know. They would be like “Ugh, do I have to do that? Ugh, do I have to do that?” Well, she would seek those jobs out, and that was one way she would choose joy, and she would offer that time back up to the Lord by doing this holy work.

So that’s the first thing for choosing joy. Choose the lowly of the low. If you’re a mom at home with little ones, you’re sleep-deprived, you may feel overwhelmed, you may be in a situation where finances are extremely limited. So everything falls to you to do. The meal planning, the house cleaning, the laundry doing, the errand running, all of it lands on your shoulders. So, seek little ways within that vocation to choose joy. For myself it’s cleaning the bathroom. I grew up with 6 brothers. I detest, I really do detest housework. I’m not a fan of it. But I have learned that by choosing to joyfully do this task with a smile on my face which, let me tell you, is sometimes difficult, I honor God. I lift that up to the Lord. I love Him through the task of scrubbing the toilet. The lowest and lowly of them all. I choose joy in that moment.

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Another thing that I do is I don't like doing the dishes – see, housework's not my thing – I don't like doing the dishes. My husband and I made a deal when we first got married: I would cook, he would do the dishes. Well, that has continued throughout 28 years of marriage, that was a good deal to make, but every once in a while I will, in love of him, you know, “You go sit down and read your book, you go do this. I know this was the deal we made, and you've honored it, and it's great. I'm going to take on the pan that, you know, burned something on the bottom of. I'm going to choose joy and offer up that time for our Lord, and for you. So I choose joy in this.” And I'll go and I'll do it. Another choosing joy in the moment.

Well, St. Therese would do the same to regards to of other people and their estimation of her. So, she had... there was a nun in her convent who used to kind of say “Oh, well St. Therese is so pious. She's so pious.” Kind of gossip. They would talk to each other and gossip about St. Therese, and St. Therese would hear this, and she wouldn't immediately go and defend herself. She would just say “Lord, I offer this humiliation, this moment of lowliness up to You.” You know. “I offer it in love.” And she would smile. And what's so interesting about that is she would drive the other nuns nuts, because she was always smiling, and she was always filled with such joy, this joy of a little child. She wouldn't let other people's opinions or gossip affect her, because she would bring it before the Lord as a small child, and she would choose to love Him with joy through that humiliation.

So, that's another thing I have learned to do. In this world of social media and an online presence and all of these things, you don't always hear the most kind things about yourself. And so in those moments, I try very hard to take a deep breath and to smile and say “Lord, I offer this to You as a small child.” You know. “This person said I wasn't nice. This person said that they thought I was, you know, a Holy Hannah, or hoity-toity, or arrogant, or misinformed, or whatever.” I try very hard to do what St. Therese did and choose joy. I don't go and I don't defend, I just smile and pray for that person and choose joy. Not always easy, but it does bring an incredible peace to my life.

One of the saints that really followed this, St. Therese's little way, she really embraced this, was St. Gianna Molla, who was a physician in Italy in the 1940s, 50s I think. And she says this: “The secret to happiness is to live moment by moment, and to thank God for what He is sending us every day in His goodness.” “To live life moment by moment, and to thank God every day for whatever He is sending us.” That's St. Gianna Beretta Molla. St. Therese did this, and this is how we choose joy. We choose to take these difficulties, take the good things and the bad things, and choose joy, and smile, and offer up whatever hardship might be in our heart over them, or whatever little humiliations might come, or whatever it is

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that's landing on us from other people's issues they may have, and we offer it back up to our Lord with joy.

So, I entreat you, I encourage you this Lent to choose joy in all those little moments throughout your day. In traffic when somebody cuts you off, in school when somebody says something not so nice, in church when you might be hearing gossip, wherever it is in your world, to smile and to choose joy in those moments as St. Therese of the little flower did. She suffered greatly in her life. She died at the age of 24 of Tuberculosis, and that was a tremendous physical suffering upon her. And what was interesting was that nun she always had such difficulties with, like they never saw eye-to-eye, but Therese would treat her with such respect and with such love, and would never fight against her. That nun was the nun who served her in her final days. She was the one that wouldn't leave her side, and cared for her, because Therese had chose to love. And so this other nun chose to respond in Therese's hour of need with love. Therese chose to give her life as a gift of joy to God, and so by choosing these little ways, these little mortifications throughout her day back as a gift. It was her path to holiness to come before the Lord as a small child, and it is a path to holiness that all of us can reach. It's a wonderful example to all of us. It's not a big, lofty goal. She just loved, and she chose joy. We can do that. We can do that.

It puts holiness... her life puts holiness in reach of the ordinary person like myself, who always is looking at God going "I'm not that holy. I just can't do this. I've sinned again. I've got to go to confession." Okay, God knows all of that. But if we choose to live moment to moment, we choose to offer with joy moment to moment, then God honors that. If we choose the light and the love over the pettiness and the greed, then we choose God. If we choose to not allow the negative to consume us, then we choose God. And that's what Lent is all about, choosing God.

So that's just a little lesson on how to choose joy in your daily life following The Little Way by St. Therese. John Paul The Great, St. John Paul The Great followed this way. Obviously St. Gianna Beretta Molla followed this way, St. Josemaria Escriva followed this way. Many modern saints followed the way of St. Therese. Choosing joy in the little mortifications, offering them up as a gift to our Lord like a small child that dandelion flower. So let us strive to do that this Lent. Let us strive to take all of those little mortifications, all of those moments where we could choose to curse at someone. Choose instead to bless them. We could choose to defend. Choose instead to take the offense on God's behalf.

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Let's pray the prayer that Jesus taught us, shall we? In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, amen. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen. Choose joy my friends. It will bring you much peace.