

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Engaging a Season of Struggle with a Spirit of Joy

Fr. Ethan Moore

My name is Father Ethan Moore, and welcome to *ba da ba ba ba* I'm Lentin' It. Let us pray together.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus, we consecrate this retreat to You through the most beloved heart of Your holy mother, Mary. May we, along with her, ponder in our hearts all the ways that You've revealed Yourself to us. And in this journey of faith, may we grow in devotion to You and to Your cross. We pray this as we ask for intercession together. 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.

Ba da ba ba ba, I'm Lovin' it. You might have heard this popular jingle, given to us by McDonalds. You know, I think a critical component to Lent is not just entering in, but loving entering in. Loving Lent. So, as we journey together through this retreat, that's what I'm going to propose – that we as a people who can often fall into the temptation of, within our prayer, alms giving, and fasting, to really feel the struggle, feel the tension, and even the stretching that Lent offers us as an opportunity. But in the midst of that, trying to take with us a perspective of love. That all of the efforts that we are making are for the sake of growth and our loving relationship with Jesus Christ. So, that begins with loving who we are, who God has called us to be, and how He has called us to follow Him.

So, beginning with this series, I just want to offer you the opportunity to reflect upon how God has spoken to you, how He is leading you in your life right now, and how you got to this place where everything that is before you is from Him. Truly a gift. And even if it's a challenge or a burden at times, that it can be something that reveals His love for you. So I just want to share with you a bit about my own vocation story as a way to reflect upon our stories, and where we are, and how God has brought us to this point.

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So actually, I was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and I can tell you that is where I first truly fell in love with Mexican food. You know, it's incredible. They just bring you chips and salsa right away. You don't even have to think, you don't even have to ask. You're hungry. I mean that's why you're there. And they know that, so they feed you. You thought I was going to say Jesus, right? Psych, got you. Actually, that took more time, and in a way that, like, the Lord drew me out of myself to Him.

But there in New Mexico, I was very blessed to have a family that loved their faith and brought me to church on Sunday, and other days as well. They bribed me to go to mass during the week with breakfast, which I naturally took that opportunity. And, you know, actually, at that time, what I call the LOLs, the Little Old Ladies, the loving saints of every parish who are committed to daily mass and just give themselves to the Eucharist and to service to the Church, they would see me as a young boy and be like "Oh, you would be such a great priest." Now, at that time, I had a bit of a rebellious streak in me, and so when I would hear that, the next decision that I would make is internally think, "Okay, because you said that, now I'm going to become a Mafia leader." Yeah, that didn't happen. Probably for the best.

But, anyways, when we moved from Albuquerque to Ohio, that's when the Lord started kind of picking up some steam in my heart and in my life. I was naturally hesitant to buy into Ohio, as much as I love the state now, and that was because, you know, Ohio is proud of a lot of things, but one thing of all: They named their state after the Buckeye. So Ohio is known as the Buckeye state. A Buckeye is simply a nut from a tree, and it happens to be poisonous, so I don't exactly know why we were bragging about it. But hey, put it on a helmet, make your football team about it, and call it good. Well, that hesitancy also came because New Mexico is known as the land of enchantment. *Ooo*. You see what I'm saying?

So we entered into Ohio in a small town called St. Mary's – there she is, Momma, behind me. I love you. You've got many back and all of our backs as we journey through these 40 days. But not knowing anyone and coming to a new place was a challenge. Maybe you have moved, or have dealt with situations where you've had to transition from one school, one life, one job to the next. That can be a difficulty. However, I'm very blessed that our house, when we moved there to St. Mary's, it opened up into a park. So our backyard was butt up against a giant park. So during

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the summer, a bunch of kids were out playing, and I got to know some of the locals.

It happened that just a couple of doors down from where we lived, there was a family who had 4 brothers. And it was perfect because 2 brothers, who were twins, they were actually my same age, and their names were Adam and Brad. Then they had a younger brother, just a couple years younger, whose name was Chris. So A-B-C. And then a fourth brother whose name was Drew. So, you see where I'm going with this? Adam, Brad, Chris, Drew, A-B-C-D-E, Ethan. It was like I was in the family.

So, you know, here it was one summer day. Adam and I are riding our bikes through the neighborhood, and I'll truly never forget. There was this girl. Oh gosh. This girl named Molly Shriver. Molly Shriver. Molly Shriver had a voice that sounded like a dying pterodactyl. *Screeches* It was just awful. It was brutal. So Molly, out of the blue, she cries out "Hey you. You look like a monkey." Now, being the consoling friend that I was, I turned to Adam and I said "Hey man, don't take that personally. That's crude, that's rude. Yeah. Let's just keep moving." And as I'm in the midst of doing this, she actually says "No, not him. You! You look like a monkey."

Now, I could tell you at that point, that moment, I knew I wanted absolutely nothing to do with the female race. Do I have to sign in blood? Like, what does it take? I'm in. It doesn't really matter, let's go for it. Now I could tell you that, but the truth is the year before I entered seminary studying to a priest, I was in a relationship with an absolutely beautiful woman who I thought I'd spend the rest of my life with.

I was living in what I would consider one of the more beautiful places in our country, on an island just off the coast of San Diego. My roommates were Navy Seals beach lifeguards, I rode my bike to work every day, I swam in the Pacific Ocean, surfed. It was awesome. And yet, in the midst of having everything, I still longed for more. And that longing was a deep abiding sense that I belong to the Lord. And that belonging resonated in me so deeply that I had to leave everything, just as we in a sense this Lent leave for the opportunity to encounter Christ, to give Him a chance to... To give Him a chance to be our everything.

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And so I came back to the Cincinnati area and began seminary. And it's there where I discovered that God was so loving, so real, that He was present. He was present to my life on multiple levels. And it is through those levels and those ways that He was drawing me to Himself.

So, one of those ways was actually through some relationships that I had. You know, one relationship to another, we are all in relationships, and this is an opportunity during this season to make these relationships about love. Intentionally reaching out to people and sharing our hearts, sharing our vulnerability, and offering who we are as a gift to others. That is what community and life here on earth is about in a big way. And so I was blessed to have one relationship in particular that I'd like to share about with a guy whose name was Dan Brendel. Now, Dan Brendel you'd like to probably put in a category of a tall tale, because he's so outlandish, the things that he'd done, that it just almost doesn't seem like they could be possible.

I'll give you an example: Dan Brendel, one day on his way to work, he's driving in a rural part of Ohio, he's a waiter, and he's just kind of minding his own business, driving along, when he looks out his window and he sees in this field a herd of cattle grazing, and he sees this one cow in particular who's doing its cow thing, you know, like *moo*. And this cow is chewing the cud with one head and out the other end is a whole other head. It was a mother delivering its baby cow. And this is a rare thing, because farmers are on it. They put the cattle, the mothers, in a birthing pen and they make it very comfortable for them. So this missed the mark on some level.

So Dan, granted never doing anything like this before in his life, he gets out of his car, rolls up his sleeves, jumps this fence, walks over to this cow, reaches into the cow, delivers the baby calf, cleans himself off, gets back into his car, drives to work, and makes it there on time. No big deal. Just another day in the life of Dan Brendel. I can tell you multiple other stories about Dan Brandel. He's featured in YouTube videos where he has tens of thousands of hits because he's an unbelievable dancer, he's been an extra in lots of movies because of his horseback riding skills. It goes on and on.

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And as incredible as Dan Brendel was to me, an inspiring example on so many levels, I have to tell you – he truly pales in comparison to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the way, the life, and the truth. He made the blind see. He made the deaf hear. He raised people from the dead. And in this Lent, He is that relationship that is drawing us to be who we are, and be that well. As St. Francis De Sales says, “And so He is also leading us through the people in our life, but He’s calling us to be Him to the people in our life, to share His life of love with others.” So relationships are so crucial in the ways in which God works through us, with us, and ultimately for us to grow in our knowledge of Him. Our love of Him.

So relationships were huge for me. Another thing that was really big was the desires of my heart. When I first began seminary, you know, seminary is such a great life. You’re surrounded by men who are just on fire with the Holy Spirit, and desire to learn and grow and pray. And so every day we’re praying together, and as we come to these times of prayer, these times of mass, something would come up quite often during that prayer time that was cause for some concern. As I would be praying in the chapel, something... the thing that kept coming up in my prayer was kissing. I was thinking about kissing all the time in prayer. I’m like “Whoa, Lord. Like, seriously, I thought You were putting this flame out, you know. Like, help me out here. Celibacy, right? Isn’t that part of this gig?”

And, you know, it’s amazing, you know, how, you know, it’s amazing. Because we can go to prayer, we can go to the mass, and we can just be there. And yet as we participate, some of the details of the beauty can be missed. And there was this one moment where I was at mass, you know, going to mass every day. But there was this one mass that struck me, and what it was is I noticed this one thing. I noticed the very first thing the priest does when he comes into the mass. Before he even says a single word, the priest bows down and he kisses the altar.

He kisses the place where heaven comes down to earth, where Jesus Christ in the Eucharist makes Himself known to us in this humble and yet profound form. And the priest and the deacon alone have the honor and privilege to reverence this place. See, that’s the thing. The Lord can put desires on our heart that we may not understand in the moment, but He puts them there to fulfill them in a way that utterly only He can. And when He does, it brings Him glory.

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And so what the Lord has put on your heart for this Lent, He wants to fulfill. He wants to bring to fruition so that you can give Him glory, so that you can live in glory, and be a person of joy. So He works through relationships, He works through the desires of our heart, and, lastly, He worked through me and through all of us in prayer.

In that same first year at the seminary, I got a phone call from a buddy of mine, and he said “Hey, I just saw this movie and it absolutely wrecked me. ‘It wrecked me.’ You’ve got to go see it.” So I’m like “Okay, okay, okay, okay.” So, I am not a good driver. I’m just going to be honest. GPS and all that, I get so confused and I just can’t stand being lost. So I looked up this movie at this theater, and I didn’t know where it was, so I’m trying to get there and I get super lost. But I told myself “If I get there in less than 20 minutes late, like, I’m going in.” Because you’ve got previews and you’ve got all of this other stuff.

So, sure enough, I arrive at the movie theater 18 minutes late, and the whole time in the car I’m praying this out. Like “Lord, ugh, I can’t stand being lost. Like, this is such a bummer. Oh, but I’m here. Okay, it’s going to be alright.” So I show up to the ticket counter and I asked the person there. I said “Can I get one ticket to *Tangled* please? *Tangled*?” Which, if you haven’t seen it, you owe it to yourself. This awesome cartoon, Disney cartoon about Rapunzel. It basically is the gospel in cartoon form, I’m just saying. And she says to me “Actually sir, you know, I just... I can’t sell that to you, you know, because actually the movie already started, and if you miss the beginning you kind of miss a lot of the details, and it’s really important.” So I’m like “Ugh, okay.” So I was really bummed.

And I’m still talking this out with God, you know. Like “Ugh, I don’t like being lost, and now I’m disappointed.” And I’m, like, almost despairing. And I walked out the movie theater and, sure enough, a car pulls up. And I looked down at the car’s license plate, and the license plate said “THX Lord.” “THX Lord.” Thanks Lord. And it was in that moment, in that moment of prayer where I realized that, like, God is present to us.

He is present to us in the finite details of our ordinary lives. And He actually cares about where we’re at. And the greatest response we can give Him is just that thanksgiving. To enter into prayer and just delight in the fact that we are loved by God. And so as we begin this retreat, may we see God through our relationships,

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may we hear Him in the desires of our heart, and may we be receptive to the ways of prayer that lead us to bringing Him glory. For He is a good and loving God. *Ba da ba ba ba*, I'm lovin' it.