

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

To Pray Like a Child

Fr. Ethan Moore

My name is Father Ethan Moore, and welcome back 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, as we continue to walk in faith with You in this season of opportunity, this season that in the midst of the cross and the challenge, to experience Your joy, to experience Your life within us. So we pray through the intercession of Your mother Mary, full of grace, full of joy, to intercede on our behalf. 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.

I just want to show you real quick the sweater I happen to be wearing right now. Yes, that is a little kitty cat tangled in a ball of Christmas lights. Now, you might ask "Why in this series of Lent to have some notion of Christmas?" You know, even, you know, without the incarnation, of course we couldn't possibly have the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And so it's important to keep the notion of who Christ was, even as He began His time here on earth, in the midst of looking to the end of His life here on earth.

When I had my very first Christmas mass as a priest, it was truly a joy, and part of that was I intentionally tried to live liturgically. What I mean by that is during the advent season, which is also a season of fasting and preparation, I had not, as best I could, listened to any Christmas music during that advent season which, of course, can be a challenge because they start playing it at Halloween now. But I wouldn't play it in my car, when I was stores I'd almost, like, plug my ears, so that when it came to Christmas Eve and I had prayed my evening prayer and it was now officially Christmas season, what I did was, at the rectory, I cranked up Christmas music as loud as I possibly could, and I just started, like, dancing right there in our kitchen. And, as a result of that, I was so pumped. I was so pumped for Christ, and His birth, and for our people celebrating that. So I was vested for mass, and I'm getting down, ready to walk down the main aisle of our church. And I literally felt

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

like Michael Jordan, Bulls arena, game 7 with the NBA championship on the line. It was just a marvelous experience of joy and glory.

And truly, that is the opportunity that we have in all of the seasons of our church. Our liturgical calendar is such a blessing for us to enter into fully in all of the ebb and flow of our ordinary lives. Seeing Christ in the extraordinary nature of both the desert, but also the glory. And, you know, this past Christmas was also a great moment for me. Different, but equally incredible. What happened was, as a result of... What happened was, not really intentionally – you know, the Church, in her great wisdom, realizes that the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Resurrection, they're just so full, they're so packed full of meaning that we really can't comprehend it or enter into it fully in a single day. And so we're given these things called "octaves". We have literally 8 days to celebrate that same mystery day after day.

And so this past Christmas octave, I, really not really doing this on purpose, began on that Monday by having a McDonalds sandwich in the day, and then Tuesday rolled around and I had a McDonalds breakfast, and then Wednesday. So I actually had 8 days of McDonalds. I called it my McOctave. And after those 8 days, I then spent the latter following 8 days in the hospital. Well, not really, but I probably should have.

And the thing is, is that the Church has such a vibrancy to us that it wants us to enter into both the feasting and the fasting. And each, in its own way, balances one another and creates for us a fullness of life, a fullness of love as we see Jesus Christ, who experienced life just as we do here on earth, but perfectly, wants us to share with Him our ordinary days and our extraordinary moments that we're given each and every moment. And so it's important as we journey through this time of Lent to see how God prepares a way for us to encounter Him in the moments. In each moment of our life, each story, each relationship is an avenue of grace; an avenue of mercy for us to dive more deeply into love.

You know, when I first entered the parish life, just starting at my parishes, it happened that a lady came to me after one of our masses, and she said "Father, I'd like to give to you a nativity scene." I said "Oh, really? Oh, that's very thoughtful. That's very nice. Yeah, that'd be great." She said "Yeah, it's just it's too big for the house, and we just don't need it, so I thought the church could use it." So I said

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

“Great. You know, if you want to bring it into the office tomorrow that would be wonderful, and I would be happy to receive that from you.”

So, sure enough, the next day Monday was my day off, so I wasn't in the office, but they came and they dropped it. And so Tuesday rolls around, and I get to the office, and I talked to the office lady, and they... I talked to the office ladies and they tell me “Oh Father, some lady came and dropped off a nativity scene. And I don't know if she told you or not, but it's missing the donkey. Yeah, so we really can't use it. And, you know, besides, actually we have our own nativity scene. We kind of are a church by the way, so we kind of do that sort of stuff.” So I was like “Oh, okay. Well I guess I'll take it then.” So I took it back to the rectory and I set it up, and I was very grateful.

And I, trying to be like a good priest right out of the gate, I wrote the lady a thank you card, and I told her in that thank you card “Hey, I'm just really thankful for your gift. And very thoughtful.” So, 3 days later I get a phone call from this woman, and she tells me “Father, I want to thank you for your thank you.” So now I'm thinking to myself on the phone “Do I now thank you for thanking me for the thank you?” But anyways, she said “But actually Father, my sister was very offended.” And I was like “Oh, really? Why would that be?” “Well, because Father, it was her nativity scene.” And I'm thinking “Well, that might have been useful information for me at the forefront to know that, but what did you do? Like, take it out of her house when she was out grocery shopping?” Anyways, so, long story short, I said “Oh gosh. What is your sister's address, so I can talk to her?” So she gave it to me. And, again, in like utter priest mode of like “Man, I have just segregated one of my people. They now hate me, they hate the Church, this is like the end of their faith.”

So I went to her house with a dozen roses to apologize. And I show up on her doorstep totally unannounced, she's in her bathrobe, and she's like totally shocked. Like “What is this guy doing here?” And I mention to her “Yeah, I'm really sorry I didn't thank you for the nativity scene and I wanted to just make it up to you.” And she actually starts crying, and she said, “You know, believe it or not, yesterday my beloved dog passed away. And this, to me, is a sign from God: These roses are for my dog's gravesite.” So I'm like “Okay...” And she was just really moved, and I'd come to find out that she hadn't been to church in over 30 years, and God had used this opportunity to bring her back. And she entered fully back into the church, and now she is participating every single Sunday. So God uses the moments of our life

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

that may not make sense in a playful way to journey with Him and experience a joy that is utterly His own.

One of my friends who was a truck driver, every single Lent he would give up eating for Lent. So what he would do, not just eating, sorry, but actually chewing for Lent. So what he would do is he would bring a blender with him everywhere. So for 40 days, he would blend all of his food and he would drink it. And he one time was invited to someone's house for dinner, and they made a really nice dinner, and he forgot to tell them about his fasting, and they said, "Oh, yeah, we have this nice meal, you know, a steak, and a potato, and vegetables", and he said "You know, I'm really sorry. I forgot to mention to you that I'm, yeah, doing this fast where I'm not chewing during Lent." And they said, "That's no problem. We have a blender." So, sure enough, they blended his meal for him, and he drank steak, mashed potatoes, wine, and veggies. And it was just this hilarious moment around the family table. As everyone delighted in their meal, so did he. Probably not quite as much, but delighted in the joy of sharing what it was that he was committed to, and the embrace of that by those around him.

During Lent, it's often the practice that we do something extra, or we give up something, or we try and make a way for God. It's so important that in the midst of that to remain jolly, to remain joyful, and see it not just as a sacrifice, but an act of love. And those acts of love are what transform our whole vision to what's before us. And that love, as we fully embrace it, even in the midst of it being a difficulty, it offers us these great moments of celebration in the randomness of God's ways that truly He just wants to share with us.

There was one Lent where I was really struggling with what I should do this Lent. I was praying, "Lord, what is it You desire from me? How can I follow You?" And it was just put on my heart, and I was like "No, not that! Like, anything but that! That's just crazy." And, sure enough, this was while I was in college, what I really felt called to was [to] give up shoes for Lent. So like "Gosh, no. Like, I don't want any attention. I don't want people to think, you know, I'm some hippy. Like, this is just weird Lord." But it was so strong that I just had to follow through. And so, sure enough, just walking around barefoot around campus, I just embraced it, and there was a lot of funny moments with that.

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

But there was one moment in particular: I was visiting a friend of mine, who wasn't really living the faith at that time, in Arizona for Spring Break. And while I was there, you know, I was like "I can't. I can't here. Not here Lord. Like, I don't want to be that, like, Jesus freak person that does this around people who think Christianity is weird already." So I kind of gave in, I buckled, and I started wearing shoes.

And I remember my friend went to work, and I was back at his place, and I was like "Okay. Well, he's not here. He won't see me." And so I took the shoes off, and I started walking around his apartment complex. And I was just praying, I was praying my rosary, and I walked over to this shelter with, you know, a roof over it, picnic benches underneath, and walking barefoot. I walk over and I just hop onto the picnic bench there, and I'm just praying like "Lord, forgive me. Like, forgive me for being so weak. For not really giving my all here to witness to You and be faithful to You." And as I'm saying this prayer I'm just like "Lord, help me to just follow You."

And, sure enough, I open my eyes and I look down around the picnic bench, and everywhere around that bench were shards of glass everywhere. The whole concrete was covered in broken glass. And I had walked all around that area, and not a single piece cut my foot. And what was even more amazing was later that day we're at the pool, and my friend, he gets out of the pool and, like, this tiny piece of glass he steps on, on his big toe and he starts bleeding everywhere. I'm like "Oh my gosh Lord. Like, You are ridiculous. Like, how could I not give my all to You?"

And so from there on I was just like "Alright Lord. I don't care what people think, or what they say. It's about You." And it was, again, it was this revelation of His fidelity and love. And so, as we embrace whatever sacrifices we're making, whatever opportunities we're taking to grow in our relationship with God during this season, I just invite you to really give your all. Whatever that might seem like it costs you, it is in one way a playful place where God wants to reveal Himself to us. And I think as we allow Him that space to do just that, He'll make Himself known in ways that are profound and beautiful.

You know, there is a priest, a Jesuit priest by the name of Father Leo Rock who says that, "God made us because He thought we'd enjoy it." You know, and that's

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

true of the season of Lent as well that He's given us, because He really thought we'd enjoy it. Dorothy Day often would say that, "We have a duty to delight". To delight in both the moments of joy, but also the moments of sorrow, because Christ is present to them. May we be present to Christ, who is playful with us in providing us with experiences and opportunities to grow, by giving our all to Him, and embracing this life of love. This life where we can live it.

Let us pray together. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Lord, we praise You for who we are, for who You've created us to be, and the ways in which You've asked us to follow You. May we give of our whole heart, and our whole mind, and our whole strength this Lent, and do all for Your glory. So we pray: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. *Ba da ba ba ba* I'm Lentin' it.