

Pray More Advent Retreat - Transcript

Following the Queen of Advent

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Hello everybody. My name is Father Nathan, and I'm here to lead you on an Advent retreat. Let's pray. *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of 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. Our Lady of the New Pentecost, pray for us. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

I would like to continue to help you to enter into this Advent in a new way. Our spirituality should always be renewed and fresh, because it comes from the Holy Spirit of God, who is both the source of the tradition, and at the same time source of the renewal. The Holy Spirit is always the same, because He's always from God. And yet He always renews from the inside and rejuvenates our souls by bringing them closer and closer to their true source, the Father. And so under His direction, the motion of the Holy Spirit should allow our spirituality to always be fresh, always grow deeper, and always be more ardent, more full of life. So how do we do that? I would like to propose that Our Lady's way of preparing for Christmas should be ours as well. After all, the very first Advent was lived in her heart. She is the Queen of Advent, because this was really her time of interior preparation for the coming of The Messiah through her giving birth to Him, her own motherhood.

So if I look at it that way, I could say "Well, how did Mary live this season? What did God ask for from her?" And I think that the very first thing we could see is Mary was taught by God to live in an expectant thirst. That is a desire for great things, and at the same time an expectancy for those great things. A type of, like, double thirst, so to speak, which is off-putting for us, because a lot of us, we're not thirsty. We're not trained for thirst. When we get to thirst in our spiritual life, we end up saying "Oh my gosh, like, this is too hard. Why doesn't God just give me something?" So we wonder "Why does He leave me in this dryness? I don't have any consolation. I don't even know if He's really there. I'm going through terrible things in my family and in my personal life, and it seems like it'll never end." It's at those moments that we need to look at Our Lady and draw near to her, because she can teach us that that thirst is actually a gift. It expands our hearts so that we're able, by that expansion, to receive the full gift that God wants to give us.

What's another thing that happened inside of Mary as she prepared for Christmas? The second thing I'd like to look at is her remarkable obedience. If we take a look at Luke chapter 1, we see that Our Lady, of course, received that

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angel's greeting at The Annunciation, and then she immediately went off to visit her kinswoman, she sings her Magnificat, and then the most remarkable things, chapter 2: ***In those day, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.***

So the very first thing that happens and that strikes us in this passage is that Our Lady wasn't allowed to live Advent in the way that she would have wanted to. What I mean by that is that a normal woman who's going to give birth doesn't think a few days before giving birth of going on a donkey ride from Galilee up a mountainous countryside to Jerusalem, in order to be lodged, in the end, in a place where the animals were lodged. This is not a typical way, especially if you know that your son is The Messiah, I mean it's kind of a special thing to give birth to the Son of God. You'd think that the least that she would want would be her own bed. I always think what happened to her flowers, you know. Because she had, obviously, flowers. She was Mary, the Virgin Mary. I mean, you can't have Mary without flowers. Roses, lilies, you know.

Well, she left them all behind, and she went to Bethlehem, and then from Bethlehem, oops, into Egypt. And then she was in Egypt for quite a period of time before finally being able to return home. Now what happened to all of her flowers? But you never see her complaining. It's amazing to me, because we expect religion to make our lives so ordered and so perfect, and yet that's not what God has ever promised us. He's promised us order and perfection as He is ordered and as He is perfect, and He is ordered and perfected by love. And love, I'm afraid, the good news is that love can be quite an unsettling thing. Love can disturb and upset. Love is a teenage girl receiving an angel in her house without having asked for one, who tells her that her whole life is going to be changed, and asks her if she's willing to come along. And love is the heart of a teenage girl saying "Yes, be it done onto me according to Thy word." Love is about having a Caesar Augustus in your life strangely, out of nowhere, upsetting all of your plans.

The edict of Caesar, this edict of Caesar that comes out of nowhere and suddenly is exactly what they're supposed to do. And look at how this happens. This is to fulfill the prophecy that The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. Isn't that amazing? If Joseph had not obeyed, if Mary had not obeyed, The Messiah wouldn't have been born in Bethlehem; He would have been born in Nazareth. But that's not what the prophecy said, and yet they went there because God leads us not just through our desires – although that is a way He leads us – and He

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doesn't always just lead us by the circumstances of life, He also leads us by other people who intervene. And here, Joseph was able to have that sense, and it's amazing because it doesn't say to Joseph that he's supposed to go down there. Joseph has to make the call, and he chooses to obey the command of Caesar without any kind of, like, supernatural guidance on this one. He got supernatural guidance to rise and take Mary to be his wife, he got supernatural guidance to go to Egypt, and he got supernatural guidance to go back from Egypt again. But to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem, there was nothing.

I think of this because, as a priest, I'm often working with couples who are trying to find God's will in their life. Or young people trying to make a discernment, "What is God calling me to?" And a lot of times, the thing that's the most challenging is that He doesn't seem to tell us. Joseph, it could have been great for Joseph to stay in Nazareth. It could have been great for Joseph to go to Bethlehem. What's he to do? His wife is pregnant, but Caesar issued his edict, and Joseph makes a judgment call. Mary obeys Joseph, and both of them, both by Joseph's decision to allow obedience to guide him, and Mary's decision to allow obedience to Joseph to guide her, allowed God's will to be done.

A lot of times it's like this for us. "Why doesn't God just tell me?" It's because God's looking for something even deeper and richer from you than just you doing His will in that particular circumstance. He's looking for an obedience of the heart, an obedience that goes beyond and deeper than the obedience of a servant, "Do this." It's the obedience of a friend. You see, when He leads Joseph and Mary free that they could stay, they could go, what are they going to decide? They have to go into their love for God to find an answer that's deeper than simply saying they will do what God commands them to do. They have to try to discern what's the most pleasing to Him. And Joseph discerns that the most pleasing thing to God would be his submission to Caesar, and so he goes. Mary discerns that the most pleasing thing for her with God is for her to go with Joseph, and so she goes. And God's will is done in the most marvelous fashion.

This Advent, let love be your order. Let love be your perfection. Love can be messy in many ways, but it always hits the mark. "I was not made in this life," Mary could say, "for my flower garden." As lovely as it is, and it must have been something – I mean, if we look at Mary's rose garden, the rose garden of the Virgin Mary, it would have been perfect, right. And so you could think, like, alright, Mary had to leave that behind. She wasn't made for a perfect rose garden. What she was made for was the sacrificial love of offering everything that she had to her God by being obedient to Joseph. And Joseph, he had to offer up an amazing sacrifice of his own judgment to do what seemed to him to be right, and to ask his wife to follow along. And in both of their submission to the messiness of love, God was glorified.

So I think, as we prepare for this Christmas, as we live this Advent as Mary did and with her, this is our second great lesson. The first: expectant thirst. And the

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second: the unexpected obedience of love. Don't be afraid to choose. Choice is a gift that God gives us by which we can glorify Him. Choose instead what's most conformed to those fires of love that are in His heart, and those fires of love that He's given to burn in yours. May God bless you this Advent, may His peace disturb you. May love be your true guard, your true guide, and your true end. God bless you.