

Back to the Basics 2
Changing your Life & Changing your Soul
Jon Leonetti

Hey friends, Jon Leonetti here, and I am back with you. Hopefully you remember the first 20-minute talk. I want to be a saint, and I hope you do too. And I think the way to get there isn't to get really creative, it's to get back to the basics, the basics of what our faith has to share with us and has to give us. Let's start with a prayer. *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Christ Jesus, help us to be able to encounter You in a deeper way over the course of this retreat. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Alright, we talked about prayer in the first talk. This was the number 1 thing for the saints, this was the game changer, this was everything that the saints knew and loved, was an intimate relationship with God. And they had it. We talked about time, that's how prayer is spelled, "time." We talked about developing a place, having a place where we can pray, or making a place sacred in our life to be able to pray. And we also talked about how, or where to start, and that is just in silence. A lot of times we think that we've got to do all the talking instead of letting God just work on us, right? In fact, Saint Therese of Lisieux once said she was... a sister yelled at her for falling asleep basically in the chapel, and Saint Therese said "What does a doctor do when he works on you?" She said "He puts you to sleep, right." So to the doctor of divines, our Divine Doctor, the doctor of our souls, Christ Jesus Himself, often times He can work on us without us kind of throwing everything at Him.

So, we've got to pray, and that's the first and most important thing. And if you need a help in that, if you need some help, enter into the school of the rosary. It's an incredible school of prayer. That's what it is. I mean, it's a school, from beginning to end, where God allows us to come to know His life in a deep and personal way. It's one of the... I think it's one of the most genius prayers of the church, because it captures both meditation and contemplation. The world has kind of hijacked both of those words, at least meditation, right. I had a good friend once that said "Jon, I meditate." And I said "How do you meditate?" And she said "I get to know me better." And I said "Gross." True story. I was like "Gross," right. I don't need to get to know me, I'm a mess, right. Meditation is not going inward, not turning in on ourselves. Meditation is what? Reaching to God. That's what meditation is. It's where you and I reach to God.

You know, when I come home from a long time on the road, I have a 2-year-old, my daughter Gianna. And she'll do one of two things: She'll either run in the other room and sit down and look the other way, and mom will say "Hey, Gianna,

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daddy's home," she'll go "Na." "Na." Or the other thing that she does is she runs around the corner to me, and she holds her arms up like this, "Daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy! Pick me up!" That's meditation with us and the Father, where we reach to God with our minds and our hearts. And that's what the rosary is, is that reaching to God with our minds and our hearts. And contemplation then is God reaching back down to us, the Father reaching back down to His son or His daughter, embracing them, picking them up, holding them close, infusing in them the great graces that God wants to give us. Meditation and contemplation.

So start with the school of the rosary, and when you pray the rosary, pray it slow, alright. A lot of times, you know, we think that we're at an auction when we're praying the rosary, right. "Hail Mary, full of grace..." Whoa! Alright, we've got to slow down a little bit, right. I think, and I really do believe this, Our Lady would rather us pray 3 slow Hail Maries than 3 fast rosaries. So pray. Pray the rosary if you can, enter into that. Lectio Divina, divine reading, right, where we can kind of enter into the scriptures in a deeper way. It's the most important book there is, right, and it's more like a library than a book by the way. But from beginning to end, God explained to us through story that He loves us. God is proposing to us a new way to be able to live our lives, and the saints got that. I want to be a saint, and I will yell that from the rooftop, which today in this day and age just means posting it on my Instagram. But I don't care, I want to be a saint and I hope you do too.

Number one, they pray. Number two, this is important, alright. We're getting back to the basics here, of our faith. Number two, the saints loved the sacraments. They entered into the sacraments, and they did so every day. Alright, let's get real basic here. What's a sacrament? A sacrament makes grace which is invisible visible, audible, edible. Sacrament makes God's grace – you can't see grace – visible, audible, edible. Let's concentrate on the second most important sacrament I think. The first is the Most Blessed Sacrament. The second is confession, or penance, or reconciliation. It's the only sacrament with three names, right. Call it what you will. It is so powerful.

This is why, friends, this is why I think our Lord gave this to us, and I think the devil's attacking right now. Why especially in the West so few people are going any longer. There's a great heresy going around the world today, a great heresy that says kind of "body bad and soul good," or body and soul are kind of at odds with each other. And this originated in the fourth century. And the church says heresy, right. The body is the mirror of the soul. And this is precisely why we go present our entire selves in front of the priest for the sacrament of confession. This is why we sit right there with him, in front of him, because where our body goes, our soul goes.

The priest, acting in persona Christi capitis – that's Latin for "in the very person of Christ Jesus the head," right, gives us then His absolution, acting in for Jesus. That's why he says and speaks in the first person. "I absolve you of your sins," he

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says. “In name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Right. He is given that authority, that’s why he wears the stole, it symbolizes his authority given right from Jesus to him. When Jesus says to His apostles, the first bishops of the church, “Those who hear you hear Me, and those whose sins you forgive are forgiven then. Those whose sins you retain are retained.” And the apostles went out, the bishops went out, and they ordained more to be able to help them to forgive sins. The saints knew how important it is and was for them to be able to enter into it right there.

You know, Mother Teresa was said often times to go to confession daily, or every other day. What did she do? Right, it’s Mother Teresa. What did she do? Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said that hearing a nun’s confession is like being stoned to death by popcorn. I think it’s true, right. What did she do? John Paul II went every Friday, Pope Francis goes every 15 days. And he’s actually the first pope in history to ever be seen publically going to confession, Pope Francis. Pretty incredible. I don’t think any of us are holier than them. Even the holy fathers, even the greatest of saints knew that they needed that sacrament. If you’ve been away from that sacrament for a while, and you want to be a saint – and, again, there’s no other reason that you and I are here, at least I buy into it. No other reason. If it’s a lie, fine. We turn the other way. But if it’s true, it’s got to be the most important thing, or the most important things for us then is to encounter Christ Jesus right there in His mercy.

And what a gift we have. The church says go to confession once a year. Now, that’s official, right, that that’s the minimum. But none of us are minimalists, at least I hope you’re not, right. You and are, I mean, what would your house look like if you cleaned it once a year? Some of ya’ll already do, but what would your house look like if you cleaned your car once a year? Right. We do it on a regular basis. It’s the same thing with our souls. You and are have got to clean up, and that sacrament is one of the best places to do it. And I’ll tell you, I have spoken with a lot of priests, I have spoken to a lot of their churches, gotten to know a lot of them. I was in the seminary for three and a half years, and many of my buddies are there now. I’ve never heard a priest, never one time, say they don’t love that sacrament.

And many of them, they say that it makes them more humble, to be able to hear other people like this, and that it actually helps them. So I want you to enter into that sacrament. I want you to go. Maybe you need a lifetime confession. Maybe you haven’t been in 30 or 40 years. A simple appointment with your priest will do. Or maybe you can just go back. Maybe it’s been a couple of years, maybe it’s been three, maybe it’s been six months and you’ve kind of jumped off. Go back, and don’t be afraid. Don’t be afraid of God’s healing. Don’t ever be afraid of God’s mercy.

Saint Faustina said that Jesus once told her that when we go to His priest in the sacrament of confession, that our sins, after absolution, become like drops in the

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ocean of His mercy. Your greatest sin, friends, becomes like a drop in the ocean of God's divine mercy. Imagine that. I can't go to the ocean now without hearing that line. I can't go to the ocean without thinking that. In fact, every time I see the ocean or large bodies of water, I'm always thinking of God's mercy, and it's right there in the second greatest sacrament that we have at our disposal, to get us again right with God. And the saints all took advantage of it. So, I want you to go, and I want you to go back, and bring your friends and family along with you as well. If you're a parent, let your kids see you going, and let it be a regular staple to the family. But go. Go. Don't delay. Go.

The Most Blessed Sacrament, the saints knew how important it was, and is, to their lives. Every saint, every saint, for them, there was nothing greater, nothing greater than Jesus in the Eucharist, nothing better to sustain them than the Eucharist, and they went, most of them daily Mass. Now, I'm not going to challenge you to go to daily Mass, because I understand life's pretty chaotic, and I'm assuming that everybody goes already on Sundays. But what if you added one more Mass to your week? How would your life change if you added one more Mass to your week? I can pretty much guarantee you this: One more Mass a week, receiving Jesus worthily in the Eucharist, you would not be the same person you are today next year. I don't think so. And maybe in a year from now you add another one. I think you would change if you enter into it. But the more we receive Christ Jesus in the Eucharist, the more we do change. We conform to be more like Him.

There's a great story of a Protestant minister that walks into town and he sees the beautiful Catholic church. And he goes to the rector and he knocks on the door, and he introduces himself and he says "I'm new here." He says "And I saw your beautiful church, and I just wanted to get to know you. And if you don't mind, I wanted to take a peak in." The priest was really excited and welcomed him over to the church, and brought him inside, and was really proud of the church himself, and was pointing to all of the beauty and the stained glass windows and everything, and telling him the story of how it all came to be.

And the Protestant kind of stopped the priest afterwards and he said "What's there behind the altar in that old box?" And the priest kind of chuckled to himself a little bit and he said "Well that's, that's the tabernacle." He says "That's where Jesus is." And the Protestant minister said "You believe Jesus is in that box?" And he says "Yes. In the Most Blessed Sacrament, Christ Jesus is there fully present, body and blood, soul and divinity." And the minister looked at the priest and he said "Father, with all due respect, you don't believe that." And the priest said "Excuse me?" And he said "Yeah, father, with all due respect, you don't believe that." He said "Father, if I believed that Jesus was in that box," he said "Right now, I would have crawled to Him on my knees and I would never leave Him."

Think about that. Think about that. Do we love Jesus that much in the Eucharist? Do we adore Him, body and blood, soul and divinity, that much? The Eucharist is

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a life soul, our life blood. The Eucharist is that for which sustains us. It's the gas to the tank, right, to be able to help us. It's what moves us in grace, and develops us in virtue. I want you to try to add one extra daily Mass. One extra. Maybe it's a Monday, maybe it's a Tuesday, maybe it's every Friday morning, you just go. And ask Jesus as He enters into you, body and blood, soul and divinity, ask Him to be changed, to be made new, closer to Him. The saints, friends, loved the sacraments, and I hope, I hope you do too.

Finally, number three, I want to be a saint. How did they do it? The saints loved Our Lady, and they took her on, and they made her known. For Our Lady, there's a beautiful image in the Vatican that Pope Francis kind of, I would say, well, made known. I had no idea anything about her, a special devotion to her. Her name, a title, it's actually an ancient title. It comes from the early church fathers – “Our Lady, undoer of knots.” You know, Our Lady, of course, is the new Eve, another ancient honorary title that was given to her. Eve, as we know, the first woman, created perfect, and was given to be the mother of all the living was presented with a choice. A choice to be able to say yes or no to God. We know what she chose. Eating from the tree, Eve actually tied a knot into God's salvific plan for us. And the early church fathers knew it was going to take a new woman, a new Eve, to be able to loosen or untie that knot, to be able to bring us now back into right relationship with God. And it just so happened to be Mary. Created perfect, and given to us as the mother of all the living.

In two specific spots in the scriptures, our Lord calls His mother “Woman.” And while that might sound disrespectful to you, of course in His day, that was the most honorary title. And they would have all known it that they could give, that He could have given her. He actually said “Woman,” and it would have been understood as they would have known Eve. And He was saying something very clearly to them during that first public miracle, that she is the new Eve, that Our Lady is the one that has untied or loosened that knot, giving us, being the first tabernacle, our Lord, Christ Jesus Himself, to be able to die for us, and now to be able to save us.

But it was only because of Our Lady's “Yes” that this actually took place. The first place, as we said before, was the first public miracle at the wedding. They ran out of wine. It would have been, of course, humiliating for a young Jewish couple to actually run out of wine at their wedding, absolutely humiliating. They knew, and everyone else knew, and everyone else was embarrassed for them. So they went to Our Lady. And they couldn't have just went straight to Jesus, but they went to the one they knew had His ear, and they asked her, and it's there that Our Lady, the first public miracle, intercedes for them.

Do you need a miracle in your life? Do you have a struggle or difficulty? And I know you've turned to God with it, I'm sure you have, but I want you to try something new. I want you to go through Our Lady with your intention. And you notice I said through, not to, because what Our Lady does is she takes all of our

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intentions, everything that we have, and she presents them to God in a way that we can't. She presents them to God perfectly. And our Lord, as we know and many of the saints say, never says no to her. Do you have a relationship with Our Lady? If you don't, I really want you to start now. The new Eve, Our Lady, untier of knots.

I'll end this portion of the talk with this story: When we first found out, Teresa and I, that we were going to have a baby, of course, as you can imagine, we were pretty excited. And we were doing all the things that first time parents do, like trying to find a name, and we were, you know, figuring out how we were going to tell all our family. Well, we got to about 3 months into the pregnancy, and it took a pretty bad turn for the worse. And it turns out that Teresa was bleeding profusely in the middle of the night, and I took her to the emergency room, and the doctor came in and did some testing, and the doctor said "It looks like you've lost your child."

And of course we were devastated, you can imagine, and I'm sure maybe some of you have. It was horrible to be able to hear. And I said to the doctor, I said "Are you sure?" And she said "I'm sure." She said "We'll order an ultrasound anyway." So we did. And it was there at the ultrasound that I heard the most beautiful sound I've ever heard in my life: I heard a heartbeat. And I remember we got back up to the doctor's office, and the doctor came in, and I said "The baby is alive." And she said "Yes, but it doesn't look like for very much longer." She said "The baby's barely hanging on." And she handed us a pamphlet, and she was great, and kind of coached us through what to do next.

I went home and couldn't really think of what to do, and I couldn't get back to sleep, so I instead waited a little bit and went to the Catholic gift and book store here in Des Moines. And there was a pamphlet that was kind of out of place near some of the books that I was looking at, and it was a pamphlet on Our Lady of Guadalupe. Well, I knew a little bit about Our Lady of Guadalupe of course, appearing to Saint Juan Diego in front of the sun and standing atop the moon, and she appeared pregnant, and everyone would have known she was pregnant, especially Juan, because she had a bow tied around her womb, that would have symbolized an Aztec woman that was pregnant. And, as we know, she comes very prominently to them, they worship the sun and moon gods, and the Aztecs would offer their children as sacrifices. She comes bringing the one and only sacrifice, more prominent than any of them and their demigods, right.

Well, as we know what happens and the story goes, 9 million Aztecs converted to Catholicism in 10 years. I believe it's the single fastest and quickest conversion and largest group of people to convert from one religion to another in history. Well, what I didn't know is John Paul II, I believe it was the year 2,000 but I could be wrong on that, but John Paul II deemed her after a visit "Our Lady of Guadalupe is now the patroness of all unborn children." And I read that in this Nine-Day Novena pamphlet on Our Lady of Guadalupe. So I took that home, and

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I put it on... I bought it for 15 cents by the way, and I put it on our kitchen table, and I opened it up, and I said to my wife "We're going to pray this Nine-Day Novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe." And she said "What?" And I said "Yeah, we're going to pray this for nine days."

And she was just a couple of years Catholic, so she had actually never heard of a novena before. And I said "We're going to pray that our baby is born perfectly healthy. And as a testament to Our Lady's intercession, we're going to pray that our child is born on her feast day, Our Lady of Guadalupe's feast day, December 12th." Remind you, we were just 3 months in, so my wife looks at me and says "Let's not get too greedy, right." And I said "You know what? We don't ask big enough things of God sometimes." So we did, and we began our prayer. And for nine days, nine consecutive days, we asked both of those intentions.

Sure enough, the next time we went to the doctor, our baby was still alive. And the next time we went to the doctor the baby was still alive. And the next time, the baby was alive. And the next time the baby was getting better, and better, and better. Until finally, on the morning of December 11th at 5 AM, my wife, she walked into the bedroom and she said "My water broke." And I said "This is going to be a long labor." Yeah. And it was. 24 and a half hours later, our son, Joseph Augustine, was born on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, 12/12/12. I tell you that friends, and I want you to hear it with me when I say this, I tell you that because I always knew about Our Lady up here, I knew the theology behind it, but I never had that personal connection like I do now.

And Our Lady only wants to give us good things. But she knows what's ultimately good for us, and that's her Son, her Son Jesus. You know, Mary has said no to me way more times than she says yes. She has said no to me, like any good mother does, even to some of my most heartfelt prayers. So it doesn't always mean something's going to happen and it's going to happen the way we want it. In this it did, in others it certainly hasn't. But what Our Lady always does when we bring our intentions to her, she helps us and purifies them, presenting them to the Son. And of course, through that grace, the grace through her most Immaculate Heart that Christ Jesus sends, we're changed as well.

I want to be a saint.