

## **Back to the Basics 3**

### **Jesus and the Cross**

**Jon Leonetti**

Hey friends, Jon Leonetti here, part 3 of our talk *Back to the Basics*, getting back to the basics of our faith, and that is where you and I are made holy. I want to be a saint. You know that by now, right? I mean, for the last couple talks I've told you that ad nauseam. I want to be a saint, and I hope you do too. Now, we talked about in those last couple of talks the ways in which we can become greater disciples, missionary disciples, and to be able to start an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus. Number one, we talked about prayer; number two, we talked about engaging in the sacraments; and number three, we talked about Our Lady.

But friends, I want to invite you to take on with that, and getting back to those basics, a new motto for your life for this part 3 in the talk. And the motto, you know, if you're like me, you like little catchy phrases and inspirational quotes. I dig that kind of stuff. But there was only one, one motto for the early Christians and the early church, and that was right here: The cross. The motto, the mantra, everything that they took on in their life revolved around this. A lot of times people say to me "Jon, why do you keep Jesus on the cross? Didn't He rise?" Of course he did, right. But there's no resurrection without this, without the crucifixion. And I think we do this as a Catholic faith to be able to remind us of that, that so too we're going to rise, hopefully, with God. That's our hope, the resurrection, and it's the highest feast day in the church, which points to the ultimate end, if we so choose, to be able to rise with Him. The church knows there's no Easter Sunday without Good Friday. There's no Easter Sunday without Good Friday. And unless you and I now take the cross in our life, we're not going to make it.

You know, Jesus said to His disciples "If you want to come after Me, take up your cross daily and follow Me." I don't know about you, but where I'm from, sometimes people will hear the priest or deacon proclaim The Gospel, and maybe it just kind of goes right over their head. I know that probably doesn't happen where you're from, but, you know, sometimes we think of like different things, or we get distracted. I want you to know something: the apostles, when they heard that line, that did not go over their heads. They were surrounded by crucifixion. Crucifixion, from the Latin "excrucis," right, out from the cross.

To be able to breathe on the cross you would have to come out to be able to breathe, kind of move around, constantly pumping your legs. That's how you would die. Your vital organs were shutting down slowly, and so, of course, your entire body was filling up with blood. That's why they would go by and they would break people's legs when they needed the tree for someone else. They got

## Pray More Advent Retreat - Transcript

to Jesus and he was already dead, so they didn't break His legs, as we know. When your legs were broken, then you couldn't push up any longer, and it would just quicken the process.

The paradox of all that is Jesus presents that to Him, to His apostles, as the key for discipleship. And if we so too want to enter into right relationship with God, if you and I in the end want to be saints, then our new mantra, our new motto for our life is the cross. And, of course, we know the beating that he took before it, walking 10 football fields with the tree on his back, the crown of thorns, the scourging at the pillar, the mocking, the betrayal even from his closest friends, those who were so scared that they left, they turned around and they went the other way, even Peter. But Jesus presents to them one way, one way now to be able to live their life, and that is a radically new way, a way now where we die with Him.

Now, you, like me, might be from a part of the world right now where you're not maybe threatened literally to be able to die for your faith. Of course there are many places around the world – our Holy Father Pope Francis is continually talking about them, and I am so excited about that. Virtually every one of his homilies he's talking about the different martyrs that are literally shedding their blood. That is so awesome. It pumps me up to be able to have a holy father that's constantly reminding the world of that. Because we need that. We need to be reminded of that sacrifice.

But the church says there's also another martyrdom, or way to enter into the cross. The church kind of more popularly coined it would be termed a "white martyrdom," where we're not literally physically giving our blood, which would be the red martyrdom, but we're giving our lives in the smallest of ways. That we die to ourselves, and now put the other first. That's what love is, right, where it's no more about me, it's only about you. And I do what I can to be able to allow what's good for you in your life. It's the truest and purest form of love. And that's why the cross is so important, because we have a God who died for us who didn't need to. You know, He didn't need to. In fact, the good thief is confused by this, the people next to Him on the tree are confused by this.

And the good thief understands it, right, but the other thief is up there like "What are you doing? You could wipe these people out. Why are you here?" And the good thief says "Remember me." He understood, he understood that this was the ultimate form of love. And Saint Paul invites all of us to become men and women of the cross. This is why Saint Paul constantly said "I preach. What do I preach? The crucified Lord. I preach the crucified Lord." No one got that. They didn't understand that. This, friends, was a paradox. This was defeat. This was defeat for all of them. They all thought it's over. All of this was a joke, all of it was a lie. He was defeated. God was supposed to come in and rein these people in, wipe them all out, take over, and yet our God goes here. Of course He defeats it by rising, but He first goes here to be able to show us what our life has to be as well.

## Pray More Advent Retreat - Transcript

And again, I'm not physically threatened because of living out my faith, but I also know there's other threats, and there's other things that hinder that. Selfishness, greed, the illusion of self-sufficiency are just a few. You know, "I can do it all myself," or "It's all about me." I just wrote my third book, the title is *The Art of Getting Over Yourself, and Why You'll Be Happier When You Do*. That when we die to ourselves, that when we die with Christ on the cross to ourselves, in greed, resentments that we hold, and it hurts to be able to forgive. But when we die to ourselves, we truly find what it means to live. And I don't mean to gloss over the resentment part, or the unforgiveness, because that's probably one of those things that you and I maybe struggle with the most. I know there's been people in my life that are hard to forgive, and there's people that I'm sure that have a hard time forgiving me, and I'm sure it's the exact same way with you.

Forgiveness is key in our culture and our society today in order for it to be healthy. But I think you and I all know this, and it's not easy, and that it hurts. You know, again, the paradox of the cross, and Jesus presenting His way was a paradox to all of it. I mean, "If you want to come after Me, take up your cross daily and follow Me" doesn't make any sense. "If you want to be first, be last," it doesn't make any sense. "If you want to have life in heaven to its fullness, give your life away," right. When was the last time you went to a motivational talk and they said "If you want to have life, give your life away," right. No, it's all about accumulation, it's all about taking, going and getting what's yours, becoming number one, right.

Now, His way, the cross is totally different. And the saints, amidst all their holiness, amidst all their love, lived this, and lived it to the fullness. You know, when I was titling this talk "Back to the Basics," I titled it first and foremost because of this. If we don't get Him right here, if we don't get Christ Jesus right on the cross, we are not going to get Him right anywhere else in our lives. This is why we hang this in every Catholic church around the world. This is why we have these in every room of our house here. And my parents think it's kind of awkward, but I don't care. This is the ultimate reminder right here of what our lives have to be. This is the mantra that the saints took in their lives. This was their motivation. Their motivation of holiness came from dying to themselves, giving their lives over.

And this has to take effect in all of our lives, every aspect. Saint Paul knew that, which is why he calls people over for what I call the first marriage conference. Remember what he says? Ephesians 5. Go read it. It's the one that makes the ladies all angry. Women, if you want to be subordinate... He says "Wives, be subordinate to your husbands in everything," right. "Be subordinate to your husbands in everything" he says. You can imagine that probably didn't make them too excited. And the guys were probably like high fiving each other, right. But I can't imagine, I can't imagine why guys would kind of get excited about this, or women would get offended at this, because, well, Saint Paul, he speaks about

## Pray More Advent Retreat - Transcript

the first line to the women, he spends the next 10 on the men. And what does he say? What does he say to them? Some of you know this. He says “Husbands, love your wives.” How? As Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church? He died. And all you ladies have to do is be subordinate? All you ladies have to do is be subordinate? We have to die for you, right. We have to go here.

And of course Saint Paul was helping everyone understand this. The feeling is mutual. We all go to the cross. And I’ll tell you, marriage, in a lot of ways, is an entering into it in a beautiful way. I’ve been married for 7 years, alright. My wife is incredible. Incredible. And I remember when she, those doors opened, and she was there with her dad, getting ready to walk down the aisle. And as she was coming down the aisle, I’m balding, you know, the most beautiful I’ve ever seen her. And I remember afterwards, you know, I remember thinking to myself “This isn’t always going to be this easy.” That now there’s 300 people here, and we’re excited and we’re joyful, but it’s not always going to be like this.

I mean, anyone that’s been married for longer than 3 minutes knows that doesn’t last, right. It’s hard. That marriage even is entering into a cross, that every aspect of our life now takes on a new meaning. Every aspect of our life takes on a new purpose. And when we get back to the basics, friends, we don’t try to get more creative, reinvent the wheel, we go to the one that He’s already created. We go to the one that He’s given to us to be able to take on. And we do so willingly, as difficult as it is, as hard as it’s always going to be. And again, if you think this is easy, and I don’t mean to preach to you on that – you already know. Going here is difficult. But friends, there’s nothing else and no other choice that we have.

And believe me, if there was a different way, I would have found it, and I’m sure you might have too. If there was another way, where we could not go here, we could just kind of avoid this, but Jesus gives this as the only way. He says “The path is narrow. To hell, the path is wide. But the path is narrow.” And the beautiful part about that is, friends, is we do have a choice. I said in one of the earlier talks, I said “You know, I didn’t get down to my wife on one knee and say ‘you’re going to marry me whether you like it or not,’ right, I said ‘will you marry me?’” A lot of times I pray the Stations of the Cross, and in the meditation that I have there’s images in there. And one of the images, when Jesus falls, is he falls down to a knee with the cross.

And I always imagine that’s Him on one knee as the groom proposing to his bride, the church, which is all of us. Proposing His love. But, you see, He does so not with a beautiful ring, He does so with the wood of the tree. And His proposal is giving us this cross as well. “Will you take this and follow Me? Will you forgive your enemies?” Which sounds amazing by the way, doesn’t it? Doesn’t forgiving your enemies sound awesome until you actually have an enemy? Then it drives you insane, right. They occupy so much of your mind, sometimes daily. Jesus says “If you want to come after Me, you’ll die to that. You’ll forgive even when it hurts. If you want to come after Me, you will love, you will take up your cross.”

## Pray More Advent Retreat - Transcript

You ever had to give tough love to someone? I had a woman that emailed me that was heartbroken because she had to kick her daughter out of her home because of some of the choices she was making. One of the hardest things this woman says she's ever done. But she knew she needed to do it. And you know why she knew she needed to do that? And every case is different, I know. But because she loved her daughter. Sometimes, taking up our cross is doing the things maybe we've been avoiding for a while, putting our foot down, tough love. We don't do so just for our own sake. We're doing so for the other. We're doing so because we want them to get right too, and get to right with God.

The saints had a lot of different opportunities that presented themselves, and they didn't need to go looking for them, and you probably don't either in your life as well. The most important thing, friends, is to be able to get this right. One of the things I suggest really is I suggest that you take a crucifix, and I suggest you put it, one – I don't care if they're big or small – in every room of your home. It doesn't have to even be on your wall. You know, we've got little crucifixes in some rooms, right. It doesn't even have to be on your wall, but to make it, so that you can't go anywhere in your house without being reminded of what your life now has to be.

Friends, I've told you before, and I'll tell you again, I want to be a saint. There's nothing more important to me than that. And I hope and I pray that there's nothing more important to you as well. Our Lord has you here for a reason, and the reason is pretty simple: because He wants to enter into relationship with you. He wants to love you and have you love Him. That's what our God wants. He doesn't need it. He didn't need it. Saint Thomas Aquinas says if He didn't continually will it into being, it would all just go away, right. But He wants it. And want is stronger than need, friends. Have a God who wants us to be with Him. To rest with Him.

Take up your prayer life, and I mean that. Be disciplined in it. It's no wonder that discipline, disciple, you know, be disciplined in your prayer life. Start that relationship if you can, or deepen that relationship with Our Lady. And every day friends, the best that you can, frequent the sacraments, enter in where He is, and especially The Most Blessed Sacrament. If you've got an adoration chapel nearby, stop in. Try to stop in once a week and just say hello, sit down with them, and ask them to work on you. I want to thank you for inviting me to be a part of this journey with you here during this retreat. And most importantly, I'm going to ask that you pray for me, and know that I'll pray for you as well. Let's pray right now.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Christ Jesus, we ask for Your blessing to be upon us, that Your Holy Spirit may come upon us to be able to help us to be able to love You. To reorder our lives so that now Your cross, Christ Jesus, becomes ours. Your cross becomes our mantra. Your cross becomes our life. We ask these prayers through the intercession of Our Lady, Your most Immaculate Heart. Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is*

## Pray More Advent Retreat - Transcript

*with thee. Blessed art thou amongst 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.* Thanks so much friends. Be confident in Christ, and receive His love today.