

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Extravagant Love

Beth Davis

Hi everybody. I'm Beth Davis, and today we're going to be talking about our response to God's extravagant love. So, would you pray with me? *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Come Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit. God, I thank You for this time together in Your word. I thank You for the gift of Your presence, and Your love for us. And I pray now that, Holy Spirit, You would give us supernatural insight into Your word, and a deep love for it. Help us to grow in all the ways that You're causing us to grow. And we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

So, we're going to be talking about extravagant love, and who better to look to as examples of extravagant love than the saints? I love the saints. I have my own heavenly holy team of intercessors, some favorites, as I'm sure you do too. But recently, I've come to know some new saints, and fallen in love with them. One of which is John the Baptist. Now, for many years, I kept John the Baptist at a distance. He was like a character out of a story book. He wasn't a real person to me. All of that camel hair wearing, and locust eating. I just thought he was too over-the-top. But recently, I had an opportunity to pray in front of his relic, and I began to see the passionate heart for God behind all of those other characteristics. And he became, for me, a real person.

Or, Saint Faustina. I've spent this past year reading the diary of Saint Faustina, and her love of God was so remarkable. There was one instance where she was coming out of confession, she had just made her confession, and the priest had given her a penance to pray a Glory Be. So, she began to pray the Glory Be in the presence of this priest, a confessor, and she was so taken up in the presence of God. She was almost in ecstasy in prayer. She couldn't get out of the words of this short, little Catholic prayer. That's how deep, that's how intimate her relationship was with the whole Trinity. Talk about love, right.

Or this year, I had a special patron, Saint Isaac Jogues. He was one of the North American martyrs. And this man had such a conviction on his heart to spread the gospel that he came to North America to preach to the indigenous people there. And he watched his best friend be martyred before his eyes. Now, he was able to escape after much torturing, but when he went back to Europe, he simply sought permission to continue to celebrate the mass, because he had lost some of his fingers in the torturing. And he came back to North America to continue to

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minister to the people, ultimately giving up his life. Now, what would drive a person to this kind of single-minded devotion? Well, the answer is love. Simple, right. Love. Extravagant love.

But I think sometimes when we look at the saints, we get it backwards. We think “I could never be that holy. I could never be that brave.” We’re intimidated by their witness, instead of encouraged by it. But ultimately, it becomes an excuse, and we think sainthood, holiness isn’t for us, that we don’t have it in us. But the good news is that holiness and bravery doesn’t originate in us. No, the genesis of the holiness that these saints exhibited started in love of God. The Catechism tells us right away that faith is man’s response to God. Faith is not man’s initiation, but God’s. Faith is man’s response to God. In paragraph 27, it says that God never ceases to draw man to Himself. It says the God of the universe is passionately pursuing our souls. Throughout our whole lives, He never lets up. He’s relentless in His love and passionate pursuit of each and every one of us.

So we turn ourselves to prayer, and we think “I did a good job praying today. I thought about the Lord, and I went before Him, and we had this moment, this heart-to-heart. But the reality is that God has been thinking about us, and pursuing us, and loving us, and giving us little reminders to draw us into His heart and into His presence all day, every day of our lives.

And there’s a great demonstration of this extravagant love in the life of Jesus. It can be found in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 26. And this is an account that’s in many of the gospels. In some of them, we hear this woman called Mary of Bethany. Popular tradition tells us that it’s Mary Magdalene, but in the gospel of Matthew 26 she’s simply called “the woman.” Starting at verse 6. ***While Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the Leper, a woman came to Him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment. And she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry, and said “Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold a large sum, and the money given to the poor.”***

Now, can we pause right there? The disciples do something that I think you and I do quite often. We’re uncomfortable, we don’t quite understand, and we criticize. That’s what the disciples did with this woman, who is demonstrating tremendous vulnerability and love before Jesus. And what do they do? They criticize her. The woman, you can imagine, was humiliated, but Jesus, ***Jesus, aware of this, said to them “Why do you trouble this woman? She has performed a good service for Me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have Me. By pouring this ointment on My body, she has prepared Me for burial. Truly I tell***

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you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

You can imagine that this scene, this woman pouring out costly ointment, this extravagant show of love was more than gratitude. It was more than respect for a good and wise teacher. It was a love born out of a personal relationship. Isn't that beautiful? And Jesus said that that act of extravagant love will be remembered for as long as the gospel is proclaimed. Her legacy is love. Now, let's go back to the saints we talked about earlier. What do they have in common, right? Because they had very different circumstances, vastly different gifts, they were born in different time periods. Faustina certainly didn't eat locusts, that we know of, right. Saint Isaac Jogues was not entrusted with the Devotion to the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and John the Baptist never left his own country.

So what do these 3 saints have in common? Love. Extravagant love, specifically extravagant love of Christ. And they were only able to love extravagantly because they had first received the gratuitous love of God for them. You see, the Trinity is an eternal exchange of love between the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The scriptures tell us in the gospel of John that God so loved the world that He sent His only Son. He didn't have to. He loved the world so much that He sent His only Son. And that same Son, Jesus, loved us so much that He went to the cross, that He gave up His life for us. He suffered, and died, and ultimately rose again for us. And the Holy Spirit, in Saint Paul's letter to the Galatians, chapter 5, we learn that the first fruit of the spirit, if you want to know if the Holy Spirit is present, the first fruit is love.

So, love is who God is. In first John, it says God is love. It's not simply what He does or what He gives, it's His very nature. It's His essence. And so it makes sense that our return to Him, our response to Him, would simply be to pour out, like that costly ointment, to pour out our love for Christ at His feet, in the presence of the whole world. Let love be your legacy. You don't have to have any special gift, or talent, money or position. All we need to be a saint is love. And it doesn't even start with us, it starts first with receiving the perfect, the profound love, the personal love of God for each and every one of us.

So I want to leave you with this question today: What do you want your legacy to be? How do you want to be remembered? We're talking more than an engraving on a tombstone. When people talk about you, what do you want them to say? Maybe after your death, but yes even now, what legacy do you want to leave in your relationships? For me, I want to spend my life proclaiming Christ, not because it's the right thing to do, but because I am deeply and passionately in love with Jesus. And I pray today that you would receive His passionate love for you.

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Can I pray for you? *In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord, You are so good. You are so loving, and so kind. And I pray now for any person here who has not felt Your personal love for them, God, that You would reveal Yourself to them in this moment. In Jesus' name, I pray that You would give them a tangible sense of Your presence, that they would hear You God, call them by name. And that they would have the courage to spend their lives, to spend themselves pouring out extravagant love upon You. We thank You Lord. You are the lover, and we the beloved. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. In the name of the Father*