

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

The Father's Heart

Beth Davis

Hi, guys. I'm Beth Davis, and today we're going to be talking about my favorite things: The heart of the Father. 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. Would You teach us how to pray? Would You do what You do best, and reveal to us the love of God and the heart of the Father? We receive that love now, and we return it back to You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

You know, I've never really been an animal person, but all of this began to change a few months ago when I came out to my car, into the garage, and I heard the most pitiful little cry. And I followed this out until I spotted a little stray cat, who had been abandoned, just a baby kitten crying out. But when I came close to that kitten, he hissed at me, and when I retreated away from that kitten he cried. My heart was breaking. He didn't know that I only wanted to love him and to help him, and so that first day I just left a little bowl of water, spoke sweetly to him, and went about my day. I came back and left some food, spoke sweetly to him, and went about my day. And this went on for a couple of days until finally, finally, this little cat came out of hiding and let me pet him.

And all the while I was trying to win him over, I kept thinking about the Father. Not that I am a perfect image of God, the Father. But instead, I was thinking how much I'm like that little wild cat with God. You know, I don't sometimes trust His motives. I don't believe all the time that God wants to love me, or to help me. I hide from Him. Sometimes I've even been afraid of God. And like that little cat, more often than not, I think I can take care of myself. That it's all up to me, and I can do it myself. But I believe if we really knew who the Father was, if we knew what He was really like, there's no place we would rather be than in the arms of the Father. There's no place that we would rather be than close to the Father's heart.

Trust would be natural. But I didn't always feel that way. Sometimes I thought about my relationship with Jesus and the Father kind of like the good cop and the bad cop, right. Like Jesus came to earth, He came to ransom us from sin and death, because the Father was mad at us. In fact, in the diary of Saint Faustina, Jesus says to her "I am mercy itself." And that is so consoling. That what I was missing, this main tenet and truth of our faith is that God is one, three persons, but one God. So,

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

if Jesus is mercy itself, God Himself is mercy itself. Jesus came not because He was mad at us; He came because the father loved us.

I want to share with you some good news today: God is not mad at you. There's nothing you could do to keep Him from loving you. From pursuing you. He's like the father in Luke chapter 15, the parable of the prodigal son. God, the Father, is like that father. He's waiting on the porch, He's watching the horizon, He's scanning the hills, waiting to run to you, and embrace you, to put new sandals on your feet, and a robe around your back, and a ring on your finger that tells the world "This is My child. This is My beloved son or daughter." That's the heart of the Father, not just for people who have been away from the church or the sacraments for years, that's the heart of the Father towards us at the end of a long day, waiting to run and embrace us, and to bless us.

The tenderness of God, the tenderness of the Father is stunning. And really, there are hardly words to describe it. It has to be experienced. But luckily, we have testimonies, we have witnesses who reveal to us the heart of the Father, like Saint Faustina. In the diary of Saint Faustina, Jesus speaks to her about humility, and littleness, about becoming like a child. And in it, she asks Him why He became like a child. Why did He become so small, and why did He appear to her at times even like an infant. And Jesus replied "Because I want to teach you spiritual childhood. I want you to be very little. Because when you are little, I carry you close to My heart." He goes on to say "Because you are weak, I take you in My arms and I carry you home to the father. And again, because you are a child, you shall remain close to My heart. Your simplicity is more pleasing to Me than your mortifications." Jesus prefers for us to be small, for us to be little, not so that He can lord His power over us, but so that He can take us in His arms like a loving, protecting, a tender father, and hold us close to His very own sacred heart.

Let's look at another demonstration of God's heart as a father. Jesus, again, demonstrates this in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 19, starting at verse 13: ***Then little children were being brought to Him in order that He might lay His hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs." And He laid his hands on them, and went on His way.*** Isn't that beautiful?

And listen, that's a scene we're very familiar with, there are plenty of beautiful paintings and artist renderings of Jesus with children. But have you ever imagined yourself as a child receiving that tenderness and love? In fact, let's do that right now. Let's use our holy imagination, our Christian imagination to picture a scene, to picture ourselves as children. You got it? Maybe you're thinking about a picture

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

from childhood of what you actually looked like. You might even know what you were wearing. But flesh that out in your imagination. This is the practice of Ignatian Contemplation, to enter into the scriptures and to place ourselves there. To interact with Jesus, and the disciples, that the scriptures might truly become our own.

So go back to that image, picture yourself as a child, and now picture Jesus. And I want you to close your eyes, I want you to imagine His face, His features. I want you to see Jesus looking at you. I want you to imagine Jesus smiling at you. I want you to imagine and listen as He calls you by name. And then would you allow Jesus to draw you close to Him? Maybe He pulls you into His arms and holds you to His heart. Maybe He props you up in the crook of His arms. Maybe He pops you on His shoulders. But this is the heart of the Father, a Father who wants to be close to His children. Hang on to that image, and allow God to love you. Not from a place of performance, not from even our adult and sometimes cynical or jaded experience, not from a place of our experience of our earthly fathers, but imagine yourself as a child interacting with the loving heart of the Father in Jesus.

You see, it's Jesus who first revealed to us that God is a Father. He spoke many, many times, He told the disciples "I will not leave you orphaned." Well, what does that word "orphaned" mean? It means without a father, without parents. And He says, "I won't do that." Because we internally have a Father in God. The first words of the Our Father, the prayer that we pray every single week in mass, "Our Father," that's the uppermost title of God, the first title that Jesus gives to Him when we pray, is that God is a father. So, no matter what your earthly relationship with your father looks like, we have the perfect Father in heaven, a perfect Father who loves us perfectly. He is strong, and patient, and present.

The scriptures tell us so many things about the heart of God as a Father. In Psalms 17, it says that we're the apple of His eye. In Matthew 10, we read that He knows the number of hairs on our heads. Can you imagine how intricate is that knowing? How patient is that knowing? In Romans chapter 8 it says that He makes all things work together for our good, for those who love the Lord. He is always thinking about you. He is always looking at you. His gaze is always fixed on you. He's like that... He's like a first-time dad, who is just staring at the features and the face and the hands and the feet of a newborn. He is totally in awe of His own creation. We are His. We are His children.

He's like the dad at our play, right. Imagine yourself on stage, and performing in a child's play, in a dance recital, and God is the Father in the audience, in a room full of people, who is standing on His feet applauding and cheering. He's got a camcorder, an old school camcorder on one shoulder, and He's whistling, and He's

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

cheering, and He's pointing at you, and He's says "That's My kid." He wants everybody to know that you are His child. That is the love of the Father. He is obsessed with you. He loves you so much. And I pray, I pray that you'll begin to experience this love in prayer. That you won't just take me at my word, but that you'll imagine yourself on that stage, that you'll hear the Father calling your name, and letting you know that you belong to Him, that He loves you, and that He is always on your side. Let's pray.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. God thank You, that You are such a good father. The father that we have always wanted. The Father who loves us perfectly. Who accepts us as we are, and who at the same time tells us that we can be more and better with His help, with Your help. Thank you, Father. Thank you for taking us up in Your arms and holding us close to Your heart. We love You Lord, we return all of that love back to You. And we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless you.