

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

Consoling Jesus' Heart and Growing Closer to Him

Tim Glemkowski

Hey guys, it's Tim Glemkowski again. I'm excited to be moving on to my second talk of this retreat, and if you don't mind let's just open in prayer again.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God, we ask for the grace, really the supernatural grace to see the situations of suffering in our life and the meaning that can be found therein, and to pick up these crosses, and to pick up these sufferings in order to grow a deeper friendship with You and to grow in deeper holiness. Mother Mary, you whose heart was pierced by so many different sufferings in this world even though you never sinned, we ask that you just obtain for us the grace to use the situations of sufferings in our life to become great saints. And Jesus, we love You, and we offer You our sufferings. Help us to carry them with You. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good. So our first talk was kind of focusing a little bit, just a brief recap, on the reality of suffering, and our need to find meaning in the midst of it. So how do we move from the place, as good Catholics, where we're just asking God "why?" Just kind of crying out for why this suffering is going on in our life, and get to the place where we start to actually use our encounters with suffering for spiritual benefit and for fruit in our lives. To really encounter what God might be doing in the midst of that suffering in our hearts, which will allow us to pick up our cross and follow Him, right.

Because everyone hates that phrase. No one likes being told in the midst of their suffering "Well, just pick up your cross." or "Bear this for Christ." Though when we do, and we grow in love with the Lord, our sufferings become... we want to pick them up in order to love Jesus. And so that's what we're going to focus on. These next few talks are going to be focusing on basically the 4 different meanings that we can ascribe to suffering as, you know, Catholics, devout Catholics. Maybe you could say the 4 reasons God might not heal us, why He might permit in His will us to continue to suffer. Like, what might He be doing in the midst of that suffering. And so in this second talk, I'm going to go through the first 2 of those reasons why if you have a suffering in your life, a situation that's causing you great pain, what God might be doing in the midst of that, or what might He be asking of you in the midst of that.

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

So I brought up in my first talk my favorite quote from Saint Teresa of Ávila. So she was really spunky, right. That was just what she was kind of known for. She's a larger-than-life personality, and just somebody who really had a lot of, you know, I don't know, a spark to her or something. Very, very outgoing. And so when she was encountering a situation of suffering in her own life, she had this incredible relationship with the Lord, you know, just so close to Him. And she said to Him at one point "God, if this is how You treat Your friends, it's no wonder that You have so few."

And there's a beauty in that, a beautiful honesty. I love the book *Till We Have Faces* from C. S. Lewis. C. S. Lewis wrote several really beautiful books that are all kind of circling around this issue of... well, one is called *The Problem of Pain*, one is called *A Grief Observed* – it's about his own grieving process after losing his wife, Joy, after only 3 years, they were only married for 3 years – and then the third is kind of an allegory or a tale, a fable he calls it, a modern fable called *Till We Have Faces*, and there was this great scene at the end where the main character finally just lets like her inner complaint, I think they call it, against the gods, because it's just this fable kind of written in like an ancient Greek way. It just all comes vomiting out from her, you know.

But it's in that moment that she actually encounters God, because the quote that's in there is "How can the gods come face-to-face with us until we have faces?" And I love that idea, of just being honest with the Lord about our suffering. I think too many of us grew up in these, you know, I grew up in a very Irish family. In Irish families, you just... you pick up your cross, and you don't complain, and you never tell anybody about it, right. You keep all of your feelings here, and then someday you die, and that's where they go. But I think there's a beauty in learning to be vulnerable with the Lord about our sufferings.

But I think what's also beautiful about that quote from Saint Teresa of Ávila is that there might become scenarios as we grow in our spiritual life where Jesus is inviting us to enter into actual friendship with Him. So I think there are... So this is my first reason why God might not heal, or the meaning confined in suffering, is maybe Jesus is desiring our closeness and our intimacy.

So think about this: There are kind of different levels in the ways that we love God, you know. At the very beginning of our spiritual life, maybe it's more of a mercenary love. I'm trying not to go to hell, you know, I know what rules I'm supposed to follow, so I'm going to love God, but almost out of what I'm getting back. You know, I'm getting back maybe good feelings in my prayer life, you know, maybe I'm getting heaven, you know, because I'm not going to go to hell,

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

right. So, like, what are we kind of getting out of it? That's what we're really focusing on.

But I think there's a second conversion that needs to happen in a lot of our lives and in our hearts, where our love for God is less mercenary and it's more selfless, right. This is the love that we find in marriage, or motherhood even, right. Like I have these 2 little kids, and to... It's one of my, as a selfish person, it's one of the first experiences I've had in my life of just wanting to love these people. Like, the stuff I do now, if I knew how much I was, you know, giving on a daily basis when I was in college I would be like "I could never do that," you know what I mean? "I'm just trying to play Super Nintendo." But, like, watching my wife, and the way that she just gives to our kids, and just loves them, like it's just... there's nothing like it, right.

And the weird thing about our relationship with God is, as we grow in our spiritual lives, Jesus is inviting us into that kind of love. Like we don't think about that somehow, that Jesus might desire our love, but there's a really beautiful book called *Consoling the Heart of Jesus* by Father Michael Gaitley, and it kind of circles around this topic. That really Jesus, when He says on the cross "I thirst," even in heaven now continues to thirst for our love and for our friendship. Like that's part of the grace, that He's pulling us toward Him. It's the grace of conversion, and it's the grace of us being changed and redeemed, but it's also this grace of, in that redemption, to enter into deeper intimacy and deeper closeness with Him.

So I think, you know, this might be what God is doing in your suffering. Like, maybe you're growing in your spiritual life and God is inviting you to be a friend of His. Because I think God has a... Jesus has a lot of people who... some people don't like Him in our world, some people like Him because of what He can do for them, some people are afraid of Him. But the more we start to recognize what a loving God He is, what a loving Father He is, it begins to make more and more sense that He actually might want to pull us in close. That maybe that is how God treats His friends is this God, this Father, who from all eternity has wept for humanity in the midst of our sufferings.

I think one of the great images of God's sorrow for us in our death, in our sin, is the image of Absalom in David, in the book of Samuel in the Old Testament. And Absalom is... it's the famous scene where he's, you know, gone to war with David. He's attempted to kill him, and he's kicked him out of the palace, he's tried to take the kingdom from him, and finally David's soldiers win this battle against Absalom's army and Absalom is actually killed in battle. He's caught, his hair is

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

caught in the branches of the tree and they shoot him with arrows, even though David had told them not to.

And David is waiting on the walls of Jerusalem when his army comes back to hear news of what's happened in the battle, and he is told that Absalom dies. And you would expect him, you know, this guy was trying to kill him, this was his son and he had betrayed him. You'd think he'd be so hurt, you'd think he'd be so just mad, you know. But he hears about Absalom's death and he weeps, and he says, you know, "Oh Absalom, my son, my son! Would that I could have died for you! My son, my son!" Right.

And that's the fundamental movement of all of human history, is us in our sin and in our death have desired the death of God. To sin is to desire that God doesn't exist, right. The Prodigal Son asks for his inheritance, like "I want you dead. I want you gone." Every sin is this attempt to, in some way, push God out of human reality, right. But in the midst of that, God didn't just desire out of vengeance or out of hatred our own death, but He actually came into the midst of it and died for us. "Would that I could have died for you! My son, my son!" So that's the kind of love that God has for you.

And so if that's the case, how much might He want for you, who He came and entered into our suffering in order to grow in our love. How much might He want you to actually grow into this adult love for God, that is less about just what I'm getting and less about what I'm feeling in the moment, but is actually so in love with Him back that we would meet Him there in the midst of His suffering. You know, I have a lot of, like, people that I know, right. We all have a million Facebook friends now, and I have friends from high school and friends from college and, you know, people I meet in work and my acquaintances and all of that stuff.

But there's a qualitative difference between the people I pull close when I'm hurting and in the midst of my pain, and the people who, like, really can enter into that intimacy with me than the people I just kind of show my best face, and make jokes for, all that stuff, right. There's a huge difference between those 2 things, between those 2 realities. And maybe that's the kind of love God is inviting you into, is a love that doesn't just love Him when everything's great, but a love that actually begins to love Him in the midst of your pain. To take your pain and to console His thirst with that hurt. To love Him enough to bear those sufferings with Him. Maybe He's trying to pull you into that intimacy.

I see that friendship with Christ really meeting in the Agony in the Garden in a certain sense, right. You know, He's just looking in that moment for friends. "Could you not watch one hour with Me? Like, I'm just so sad." Have you ever

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

felt that way? Like very isolated in the midst of your suffering? Like very... you're hurting, and you don't think anyone understands, and they're not with you, and you just feel very alone? Like maybe that's where we meet Him. When we're suffering and it doesn't make sense, and we don't know why we're suffering, maybe that's where we're supposed to bring that pain, is to meet Him in the Agony in the Garden, to watch with Him in the midst of our suffering. Because when we're in pain, when we're suffering, we think it's never going to end, right. Like, we never see an ending in sight. We thrash, and we try to get out, and we try to figure out anything else to do with it. But maybe He's inviting us into that intimacy, maybe He wants us to love Him more deeply, maybe He wants to be our friend, not to just have us be like a fan of His from afar. Maybe He's pulling us close. I think that can be one of the reasons that we're suffering.

The second reason that we might be suffering and not finding healing from it, or not finding... being alleviated is because maybe God is inviting us to be little. Maybe God is inviting us to not be exalted about our own holiness.

And here I'm kind of thinking of Saint Therese and Her Little Way. You know, so Saint Therese was this saint who died at the age of 24, but after her death her diary came out describing some of her interior journey. And it was, you know, widely and immediately kind of acclaimed, you know. The sense of the faithful was that this was an incredibly holy person. And really her entire... the spirit, or the ethos kind of her spirituality was this idea of humble confidence in God.

You know, she kind of compared herself – she was a Carmelite sister – to some of the great, you know, named after Teresa of Ávila, like these great saints of the past who had been, you know, extraordinary kind of in their feats and in their holiness. And here was this little young woman, girl, who had, you never really... she left her town but was in a monastery right near her town, and never really accomplished anything incredible with her life, and didn't even in herself feel like she had really reached, you know, the interior heights of holiness that... where, you know, she could kind of really recognize her own... she always felt small and little.

But in that littleness, you know, was very much so trusting God in that, was... It kind of made her entire premise. She called it her kind of escalator to heaven, this idea that, at the end of her life, she would just cast herself entirely on God's mercy, completely empty-handed with nothing to show. And I think sometimes in our spiritual life, you know, after a few years, and we start to put a little prayer life together in our, you know, we stop sinning in some of the big ways that we used to. I think sometimes we can start to slip in without realizing it into spiritual pride – it's what John of the Cross calls it, spiritual pride – where we start to really notice our holiness. You know, “Wow, look at us,” and we forget how much of

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

what's happened in our lives is because of God's grace. We start to think of it more as something we really created of ourselves.

You know, Saint Paul talks about this in his famous story where he has a thorn in his side, you know. He calls it a thorn in his side that he begs God 3 times to remove from him. And God finally tells him that He's not going to remove it because His power is made perfect in weakness, you know. ***My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness.*** And I don't think we realize how many times the great saints felt this way. You know, Saint Francis of Assisi, at the end of his life, would talk about how he was the greatest sinner. He's not kidding. Like, he really does recognize his own poverty and his own sinfulness. You know, that's striking to us, because we're all probably much bigger sinners than Saint Francis of Assisi, but that's not just piety talking, he's not just saying that, you know, to appear holier. Like, he really just recognized his own littleness.

And I think sometimes that can be one of the reasons that God allows suffering to persist in our life, it can be that thorn in our side like Saint Paul. And Saint Paul says ***To stop me from being too elated.*** Think of the amazing things that Saint Paul was doing. You know, baptizing the entire ancient world, you know, traveling to all of these places, there's, you know, incredible fruit coming from his ministry. What if he starts to think of that as himself? We've known that, right, public figures who've started to become absorbed in their own mystique of their public ministry, and then eventually, you know, scandal happens or something, right. Like, that's God saving us sometimes in our suffering from that, because we recognize when we're suffering we're less able to do some of the incredible, holy things that we used to do.

When we're really in, you know, consolation, and we desire to do amazing things for God, it can be easier to do those things, and then it's much harder when we're suffering in serious ways, when we're really kind of up against it. But maybe that's what God wants. Maybe God wants us to become more reliant on His grace. Not so much recognizing just kind of our own power, but learning to kind of let go of that. Learning to let go of even some of the spiritual, I don't know, like, prowess that we feel like we've achieved, to become little in that way. And suffering brings us back to our knees in a powerful way in that sense.

And then there's a latent Pelagianism in a lot of the ways that we often see our own holiness and we see our relationship with God, it's very much so often from the idea. Pelagius was a heretic, Pelagius was a heretic back in Saint Augustine's time or a little before him, who basically said that you could become holy on your own power. Like, if you just tried enough, that you could become a saint essentially, and the church struck that down. And then a new form of it popped up called Semi-

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

Pelagianism, which said “Okay, you can’t become a saint on your own power, but the first steps towards sanctity, like turning away from sin and toward grace, that can be done with your own willpower and your own grace.” And then the church even condemned that as a heresy.

But I think it slipped its way back in sometimes into the way that we think about the spiritual life. Like “If I just try hard enough, and if I just apply myself.” And really, and then we start to even turn that against other people, like because we feel like we’ve... when we get caught up in spiritual pride, we start to look at other people who are lost in sin and kind of look down on them and say “You know, why don’t they just kind of figure it out. Like, how can they be so?” Without recognizing that, like, “There but for the grace of God go I.”

You know, all of us, we’re dead in sin before Jesus Christ came and saved us, and everything involved in that salvation, we can cooperate with it. It’s not like we don’t, you know, have any part to play in God’s grace taking over lives and divinizing us, turning us into God. But at the end of the day, that initial grace, everything to... in order to... we can’t do that on our own. That’s God’s grace. That’s what we’re saved from, and so our suffering reminds us of that fact. As we start to get a little bit further into our spiritual journey, it helps just remind us that at the end of our lives, all we have is God’s grace.

Those are the 2 things I would kind of want to leave you with in this session, is essentially what’s at the heart of some of the reasons why God might be allowing us to continue to suffer. Remembering first that He might be doing it to pull us into closeness and intimacy, and then at the same time, like a good father who wants to correct us when we start to go astray. When we get a little bit more advanced in our spiritual lives and we start to turn towards spiritual pride, suffering can help us to remember that we’re utterly reliant on God’s grace, and we’re no great thing ourselves but we’re only made great in the grace of Jesus Christ and cooperating with that grace. So, let’s close in prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God, we thank You for Your grace, and we just once against cast ourselves upon that grace. We ask for the recognition of our littleness, but also of our... how incredibly loved we are by You. We ask for the ability, the grace to turn toward You in the midst of our suffering, and to allow ourselves to be made little, and to not be despairing in the face of our own littleness, but to instead humbly and confidently cast ourselves upon Your love and on Your mercy. Amen. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanks so much.