

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

Letting God Make the Most of a Broken Past

Part 1

Mario St. Francis

Hi, I'm Mario St. Francis, and it's my honor and pleasure to be here with you for this online retreat. Let us begin with a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord and all you heavenly host, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Blessed Mother and all of you holy men and women, angels and saints. Be with us now in this time. Be with me and be with the listener. For all of those who take part audibly, visually, may we be enriched spiritually; may we come to know, love, and serve You even more, Almighty Father; may we be sanctified in this time, enriched, inspired; may we walk away with some education, some motivation, inspiration to live our faith more deeply. To be missionaries in this world, to do great good for You, Oh God. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

So, greetings. Thank you for your time and for your attention. Now, let me just set on the onset and just lay this out there, that I am not here to be a guru, and I'm not an expert. I am a witness. For this time in the online retreat, I want to walk this journey with you and just share with you a bit about my life, the healing power that Jesus offers us, that each one of us can pursue. Healing, hope, and to do great things, no matter what has happened to us. And so I entitle this *Letting God Make The Most Of Our Past*. It can be a broken past, it can be a troubled, emotionally, physically, spiritually, all of the above, or none of the above. Each one of us either has a personal experience, or someone whom we know that we are praying for more, for healing, that we wish and will good for them or for ourselves.

I am a witness. I don't have all the answers, but I'm a witness. I'm a witness of what God can do, and how He can turn a victim into a victor, how He can take a worrier and make them into a warrior. A trial that you've gone through, He can make it into a triumph. He can take our messes and turn them into a message. He can take a test and turn it into a testimony. That is a life that I've lived. I'm a pilgrim on this journey. I hope I can say at the end of my life that I fought the good fight, as Saint Paul tells us.

As one priest at Steubenville, where I studied for 2 years, said, right before we went on a mission trip, he said "I'm just a hungry beggar showing other hungry beggars where the food is." I like to think of myself in the same way – I'm here to

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tell other hungry souls where I have found food. The good, the bad, and the ugly. I want to inspire people. I want someone to look at me and say “Because of you, Mario, I didn’t give up.” If they could just make one less mistake, then I feel like my life and my suffering has had more purpose. As Saint Paul says, to ***Fight the good fight for the true faith, to Hold tightly to eternal life to which God has called us, which we confess, and we have been called to confess before many witnesses.*** That comes from the book of Timothy.

You know, there’s a quote that I really love. It was by Theodore Roosevelt, one of the presidents of the United States. It’s called *The Man in the Arena* speech. If you haven’t heard it, let me read it for you now: “It is not the critic who counts; it is not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit actually belongs to the man who is in the arena, whose face is marred with dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who never know victory nor defeat.”

You see, God, as Mother Teresa says, has not called us to be successful, but He’s called us to be faithful. He doesn’t want us to be just the pew sitters, who are pointing out how others can do things better, and how things could and should be, but He wants us to dive into that arena, to fight the good fight, to strive. And while perfectionism can be an issue and has been an issue for me, and has been an issue for so many who I run into around the world, the race that we’re called to run, it doesn’t... it’s not all about who’s first and who’s the strongest, but rather those who stay the course, who fight that good fight. My prayer is that, in this time and always, you’ll take – like, for example, as Saint Matthew says in the scriptures: “Don’t quit. Don’t give it. It’s all well worth it in the end.” That’s a little adaptation of what Matthew says.

I believe in God not because my parents told me, not because the church tells me, but because I’ve experienced first-hand and personally the goodness and the mercy of God. I don’t know where you are, what you’ve gone through, and what you’ve been through, what you’re carrying, but I have felt love and loss; I have felt grace, and I have felt crazy; I have found God and lost God; I’ve had faith and I’ve lost it. And I do know this: that God does draw straight with crooked lines. That miracles do happen. That, like the stained glass window in the church, pieces of us that have been broken and shattered, in the hands of the master, in the hands of the potter, that He can take these. And if we allow Him, He will use them to make great art, to

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turn our mess into a message, and that trial into a triumph. My prayer for you is that you will strive, always, regardless of what happens, to do more, to do better, to do good, to do great good, and to be united to God.

Now, my story isn't a pretty one. I have travelled the world as a speaker and as an evangelist, but that's not how I started. I pursued fame, fortune, and romance, got into the Hollywood scene as an actor and as a model. In my life, there has been temptations of the flesh, for example high school. You know, I felt the pressures of fitting in, and I gave my virginity away before marriage, thinking that this was it. I could have promised to you deeply and passionately that I was going to get married, that this was the one. But there was also these pressures of being like everyone else, and being on the same timetable and schedule of those that were around me, even in Catholic education. So, premarital sex. I know what it's like to deal with things like divorce. I have worn the scarlet letter of many of the stigmas that we would normally reject somebody for. I have pressed the boundaries of what it means to be a Christian. Is it just what's on the outside? You see, as a model and as an actor, I lived that way. But having a conversion, a deep experience with God, you would think that I would have learned all of the lessons.

I want to invite you to stay tuned for the next parts, as I will share with you a little bit about my life. What I call sometimes "Confessions of a GQ model." Letting God make the most of a broken past." I'm a witness, I've experienced the grace of God and I have struggled, and I continue to fight the good fight. So stay tuned and stay with us here at this wonderful and blessed retreat. God bless you. And let me end in a prayer this segment.

Oh Lord, Almighty God, I entrust to You every heart, mind, and soul, and the family of those and the needs of all those who are gathered with us here. May Your grace and Your blessings truly penetrate our hearts and minds and our lives, that we can make great things. That we can do and be who You've called us to be, and place ourselves in Your hands. You are the master, the potter, the artist, and whatever fragments that we have we place before You now, Lord, that You may do as You will with us. And we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen. In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Thanks, and stay tuned.