

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

What to do When God is Silent

Tim Glemkowski

Hey everyone, my name is Tim Glemkowski and I'm a Catholic speaker and an evangelist, and I run an organization called L'Alto Catholic Institute that works with parishes and local communities to help them just think big-picture about making a culture change focused on mission. And I'm really excited to be with you guys for this online healing retreat – I thought this was such an amazing idea when I was contacted by the people from Pray More Novenas. I was thinking to myself “I can't believe more people haven't done this.” So it's really going to be a joy to present this next series of talks.

And really I'm going to be focusing in all of my talks on the idea, that what do we do in the midst of our suffering, in our genuine need for healing when God is silent? Like, when He's not... what happens when we're not being healed? You know, how do we, as Christians, encounter the reality of suffering in our world, and even bear it joyfully through the resurrection of Jesus Christ? But before we do that, before we dive in, join me in prayer.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Jesus, we ask that You send out Your Holy Spirit on all the participants in this retreat. And in a particular way, Lord, I ask for an outpouring of the virtue of hope into all of our hearts; the ability to encounter the evils in the world, the significant difficulties in our lives, the sufferings that we bear often silently, often without any other people knowing, and that we feel isolated in and discouraged, Lord. I just ask that You send out Your hope and Your peace into all of those places. And Lord, we consecrate this whole retreat to Your Sacred Heart, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

And just join me in praying a Hail Mary. *Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among 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. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Good. Well, yeah, so I'm really excited to be presenting on this topic. You know, I think it's important to include in any conversation about healing this reality of suffering, or what happens when we, as good Christians – people who are close to the Lord, who are really trying to walk with Him and trying to do good with our lives – encounter sufferings that just don't seem to go away, right? This is like one of the fundamental reasons that people begin to doubt their faith. You know,

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

Bishop Robert Barron says that this is one of the... really the only good argument against the existent of an all-good and an all-loving God, is the reality of evils in our world, you know. And I think it can be especially discouraging when we, as Christians, are, you know, trying to really follow the Lord. You know, why do bad things happen to good people? When we've drawn close to Him, and we've come close, and maybe we've been let down, or disappointed, or He hasn't healed a family member with an illness or our own sickness, or we've lost someone. And it just doesn't seem to make sense, and especially He seems absent in it, you know, what do we do in that reality?

I think it's really good that this retreat is focusing on, first and foremost, the idea that God wants to heal. That our God is a loving Father, and that He wants to come close to us, you know. That there is, in a certain sense, there is an image of God the Father, I think, in Jairus, in the gospels, who comes to Jesus and says... you know, it's kind of funny. Like, this is, in a certain sense, God the Father coming to Christ saying "I want to send You," you know what I mean? You know, the Word from all eternity is going to be sent to earth incarnated to come close to us in our sufferings, you know. "Long lay the world in sin and error pining till He appeared."

And there's this fatherly love and this fatherly care that God the Father has where He wants to heal us. You know, we, due to Original Sin and the evils that we encounter in the world, the reality of suffering is ever-present in our reality. You know, really outside of the Christian message, outside of the hope that's offered us in Jesus Christ, I don't think that there's actually a good answer to the problem of suffering. I think really the only other possible solution is the Buddha solution to the problem of suffering. You know, every religious group in some ways is attempting to wrestle with this reality of "What do we do with the pain that seems latent in the human condition?" that we all seem to struggle with. And for them, it's apathy, you know what I mean? It's the lack of desire, to remove from one's self all desire is the way to fundamentally avoid the problem of suffering. And, you know, outside of the Christian message, outside of the hope offered us in Jesus Christ, maybe that's the best we can do as a human answer, just when we encounter suffering.

But I think there's more to that, there's more for it in Jesus Christ. You know, really in the book of Job we see kind of the most obvious conversation in scriptures about the problem of evil and the problem of suffering. This is the place it's most directly talked about. You know, John Paul the Second wrote a document on suffering called *Salvifici Doloris*, and in there he says that scripture itself is a great book about suffering. That if you read the entirety of scripture, really what you're encountering there is a conversation about suffering, you know, between the Holy

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

Spirit, the Divine Author, and the human author. But in Job in a particular way it's really focused on and really addressed.

And, fundamentally, at the end of that book, Job finally cries out to God in anger. And it's beautiful, right, this faithful servant has been... has felt so lost and all abandoned, and he just kind of rips his heart open and cries out to the Lord. But there is this bitterness in him, right, and because of that bitterness, because of that lack of understanding, the Lord God kind of comes before him and says "Were you there when I formed the oceans? Were you there when I formed the seas?" And He's basically saying to him, like, "You don't see My big picture. You don't see this entire tapestry of all of human reality in everything that's happening. So I can't give you a simple answer to why you're suffering." Like, there is no easy answer that God can provide in there.

But there is a beauty in that moment of Job's suffering encountering the mystery of God. And really, I think the final answer that God provides on that reality of human suffering is the cross of Jesus Christ. This is the answer that God... there is no simple solution, there is no just, like, you know, kind of open and shut case, and "Here's exactly why you're suffering in your moment, and here's how we're going to take it away." But really, God's answer to suffering, His fatherly answer to this problem that we encounter in our reality, is to enter into it. Is to say "You are suffering," and in this moment, and in that cry of the cross of Jesus Christ, ***My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*** we see fundamentally that God the Father is willing to enter into, to send His Son into our suffering to be with us in it, right. And so I think that's a powerful thing.

But I think at the same time, I love that this retreat is focusing on healing because I think that's not talked about enough in our world. I don't think it's talked about enough about the fact that God really does want to heal. You know, I think sometimes we think, like, you know, "Okay, Jesus healed back then, He did great miracles, we read about Him in the gospels every Sunday. But it's something locked in history, you know, with the person of Christ back then." But the whole point of the church is not that Jesus has departed back to heaven and now, like, no longer interacts with human society; it's an extension of the incarnation into our time, this plan for Jesus, for God the Father and the Word of God from all eternity to say "How is it that, you know, after Christ comes He can continue to be with..." ***Lo, I am with you to the end of the age.*** That's the point of the church.

And so the miracles, the healings, everything that we see in the gospels, you know, God is still active. He's living and active in our reality, and He does want to heal. So I think... what I want to give you is just in this kind of introductory talk that my next 3 talks, my next 3 sessions are really going to be focusing on: How do we find

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

meaning in the midst of suffering as Christians? Like, how do we walk with God in it? Because I think that's the most important question fundamentally. But for this introductory talk, I just want to talk a little bit about the reality of suffering, and how we as Christians begin to make sense of the fact that even once we continue to follow... once we begin to follow God seriously, many times there remains in our lives situations that are difficult and are out of our control. And especially, how do we not begin to lose faith, or to doubt God's love for us in the midst of those sufferings?

So, you know, I want to just briefly tell you a quick story about kind of a time in my own life. Right after college I encountered a few, like, situations. You know, the practicals of my life weren't necessarily lining up, and there were some really significant sufferings that had happened around the same time. So, really I felt just trapped and kind of lost in this negative scenario for a couple of years where just nothing seemed to be going right. And I was kind of heartbroken to be honest with you, because about 4 years earlier I had given my entire life to God, I kind of left behind everything else, you know. ***Sell all that you have and follow me.*** Like, I did it, you know. Like friendships, and the way I was living, and all of that stuff, like I was really trying to devote my life to God.

And all of a sudden, upon graduating college, nothing seemed to be working out, and I couldn't really understand it. And in addition to that, I think the hardest part for me was that I began to not only slide into, you know, kind of an actual... like a depression. You know, not that I began to kind of slide into this physical, you know, chemical depression, but actually that when I would go to pray I would cry out to God, you know. I would just try to understand and open my heart and expose it to healing, and just ask for grace. And in the moment I felt like I needed Him most, not only was I not receiving consolation in prayer, but it actually felt like He had just pulled back completely. So that desolation, that spiritual desolation in the midst of my situation, it really created in me these feelings of abandonment. Like, I felt, I understood what Christ when He said ***My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*** Like, that's how I felt in the midst of it.

And even later, once the, you know, some of the more... the depressive episode and the difficult scenarios that I was in, once that was all kind of alleviated I was left with this feeling of this wrestling with God, of just like "Where were You? And how do I begin to trust You again if this is kind of where... Like, if this is what following You means, maybe that's not for me." And I kind of love, in the midst of that, I encountered a quote from Teresa of Ávila, who said to God – you know, she's praying, being honest with Him, and going through a tough situation herself – and she said "God, if this is how You treat Your friends, it's no wonder that You have so few." right. And we're going to talk more about that quote, I love that

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

quote. I actually think it points to one of the things that God is doing in our suffering. But there's a beauty in that, a beautiful honesty, and that's kind of how I felt.

So a few considerations as we start here on the reality of suffering. What I want to do, as said, in my next couple of talks is go through the 4 ways that we can find meaning in the midst of our suffering as Christians. Because I think ultimately, that's what we need. Even more than an answer, we need to fundamentally find "What is God doing? Where is still the meaning of my life in the midst of this suffering?" You know, as we see the suicide rates and just the general cultural despair I feel like sometimes in our world, what people are fundamentally wrestling with sometimes, I think, is a loss of meaning in the midst of their suffering.

We're told that life has meaning when you have a big paycheck, and everything's going well for you, and there's no suffering in your life, and there's no pain, and you have everything that you're supposed to have. But once that breaks, once that whole system breaks and things don't go our way, does our life still have meaning? I think it's fundamentally what we're after. And so that's really what I want to focus on in those talks, is how do these Christians find meaning, find a place where the reality of an all-good God and the current suffering that we're in can meet? Because I think that's the most important thing we can do.

The first things I think we have to do though when we encounter suffering is to ask ourselves the question, first and foremost, "Is there an obvious solution to my problem?" You know, so God has given us human reason, He's given us those circumstances in our life, and if there's an obvious solution to our problem, we have to avail ourselves of those opportunities first. You know, God's will is always found kind of in the present moment, and so if there's a difficult situation with a family member that's causing us a lot of pain, and by apologizing, you know, maybe they won't even receive it really well, but we do have to go and ask forgiveness, or maybe forgive them in our own hearts and kind of start that process. If there are obvious solutions, or if it is a physical suffering and there are medical, you know, opportunities that we can avail ourselves of, we always go there first, right. So God has given us those as ways to be healed, so always take those opportunities.

I think the second thing I would say is when we're looking at why is God... "Why is healing not happening in my life, what's going on there," I think the question we have to ask ourselves is "Is there an impediment to healing?" When I look back at my scenario of suffering years later, I realize that there were some things in my heart that were really being obstacles that I had put in place to really experiencing

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

the peace that God wanted to offer me. That peace maybe possibly at different times could have been mine, you know, that spiritual, deep spiritual peace, but I was kind of kicking and screaming too much to really appreciate that, you know. So only in retrospect did I see that, but sometimes in the moment, you know, we can ask ourselves “Have we put impediments in place? Is there unforgiveness in our heart? You know, is there different things that have kind of crept in there? Bitternesses and angers that are stopping the Lord from really, you know, entering into our situation in the way that He wants to and that He could?” Right.

But given those things, if those things haven't happened – if there's not an obvious solution or an impediment and we're still not experiencing healing in our life – that's when I think the question of meaning comes in. So, you know, I think really at the end of the day, that's Jesus Christ's answer to suffering, is that there is meaning still in the midst of it. Like, we're going to experience it, it's going to be part of our lives, but we can find a meaning in the heart of it that still provides us with a way to move forward in our lives.

There was a psychotherapist in the 20th century, Viktor Frankl, he wrote a book called *Man's Search for Meaning*, and he wrote it based on his experience in the concentration camp, right. Like, probably the most hopeless scenario that any human could encounter, and he wrote this book basically because what he realized, from looking at the experience of different people in the concentration camp, is that even in the midst of the most, you know, horrendous thing that has happened in human history maybe, that there are people who still were... something in their lives that almost was, you know, characterized by joy. And he couldn't make sense of it all, it's like what did that mean?

And as a psychotherapist, he was trying to think into what was their mindset, and what he realized was that even in the midst of their horrendous circumstances, that ultimately circumstances didn't determine happiness. That fundamentally, what determined happiness was that they were still able to say yes to their life. So that's the original German title of the book *Man's Search for Meaning*, is basically it means something akin to “In spite of everything, say yes to life.”

And that's what the cross of Jesus Christ allows us to do. It shows us that there's a hope waiting for us, that there's an answer to all of the suffering that we've found, and that life is still fundamentally good. Because that's what suffering is, right. Suffering is a lack. It was never God's intention for us. I think it's an important thing that we have to note, is that there's a difference between God's active will and His permission will. Everything is willed by God, everything only happens because it's somehow part of His Divine Will, but there's a big difference between His active will – which is His original will for humanity and for us – and His

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

permissive will – which is things that He permits to happen, that He allows to happen, but that He can bring a greater good out of.

So that's the incredible reality now of the post-resurrection world that we live in, that we see through entering into this scenario of suffering, this death of Jesus Christ, that now in the resurrection, the world was actually made better than it would have been had sin never entered the world, right. So we sing that at Easter, "O happy fault," like the happy fault of Adam that won for us so great a redeemer. And so in your life and in my life, God can do the same thing, right.

Because of who He is, in His permissive will, even though He didn't want this evil for us, like He didn't want for us to suffer in the way that we do, He can still bring good out of it. And so I think in our suffering sometimes, we spend so much time just asking why. "Why is God allowing this?" or "Whose fault is it? Is it somebody else's fault? They did something to me and now I'm suffering? Or it's my own fault? I'm lost in shame and guilt because of the sins that I've committed that have led me into this suffering?" But I think at the end of the day, none of those are the important questions to ask.

The important question to ask is "What can God do with this now? What can the resurrection of Jesus Christ do when it encounters my suffering?" Because that's the divine economy, that's the world that God has now recreated in His image, it's a world where suffering, these lacks, all of these goods that we were supposed to experience, we no longer experience them in our life in a particular way, or just in general. But having encountered that evil, and having won the victory in Jesus Christ, God can now take suffering and He can help us to find the meaning. What's He doing in it?

So I think that's the big question we have to shift from. We have to move from the place of "God, why are you doing this?" and to get to the place – and it takes a while, and it's a journey – to where we can say "God, what are You going to do with this? Since You're allowing this in my life. It's not Your active will, You're not mean, You're not vengeful, You're not a bad, you know, You're not angry at me, but because it's happening in my life, what can You do with it?" And I think that's when we really start to encounter the meaning of our suffering, and we start to experience the fruits of it.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, it is now and ever shall be. World without end. Thanks so much, I'm looking to continuing to present these talks.