

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

When God Asks Us to Be Little: The Little Way

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Let's begin in prayer. *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Jesus, we ask that we can see Your plan in the midst of our... in the midst of our suffering, and that we might see what You're doing in our hearts, and how it is that You're calling us to bear fruit and to allow... to become the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies so that we might bear fruit in the world. And we consecrate this talk, and again, all of this entire retreat to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. So we'll all pray together: 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 the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Good. So, you know, in our first talk we just kind of gave an overview of the reality of suffering and, you know, just some introductory thoughts on how we as Christians, as devout Catholics, can continue to move forward even when stuck in situations where there's maybe a persistent suffering in our lives that we feel like is holding us back, or is creating just a constant pain in our lives. And then in the second talk, we started kind of transitioning into this set of 4 different topics we're going to focus on, or 4 different reasons why God might be allowing a suffering to persist in our life for the sake of a greater good.

So what might be His plan? How can this all-loving Father, who wants our good and who wants us to have life, and to have it abundantly, how can that also coexist with what we know to be the reality of suffering that's unavoidable, inescapable in every human life? It's just part and parcel of the human condition to encounter evil, to encounter the lack of good in our fallen world, and how do we continue to push forward and to grow? How do we understand what God might have, what purpose He might have in the midst of our suffering? So the first 2 that we gave is that He might want to draw us into intimacy, into a greater closeness and friendship with Him, and then second that He might actually want us to be little. Like Saint Paul, He might give us some kind of suffering to help keep us impoverished in front of Him, humble, which is a great place for God to work with us, right.

So the third one that I want to focus on is the reality that, in our suffering, God might actually be preparing us for a mission. So I should say first, as far as whatever reason suffering, you know, might be going on in your life, I think these are always the kind of things that can be unpacked with the spiritual director, right.

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

It can be hard for us sometimes to ascribe meaning and purpose, to really see the hand of God, the Holy Spirit working in the midst of our own spiritual life and in our own suffering. But perhaps a spiritual director with a deft touch and a good spiritual awareness can point out maybe what it might be that God is actually doing in your life in a particular way. So I'd invite you to avail yourself of that opportunity, if there are good spiritual directors in your area. I know that's not an opportunity for everyone. Maybe even a good conversation with a holy person can sometimes help to bring greater clarity and meaning to what God might be doing.

So the third reason we want to focus on is that, in a similar sense to kind of our first reason – where Jesus might be inviting us into suffering to console His heart, to be joined, you know, in friendship and in intimacy and in closeness with Him – it's possible that in our suffering Jesus might actually be inviting us close to in terms of His mission, and He might be pulling us, using our suffering to forge us so that we might be available to a greater mission. So we know that it's part and parcel of every Catholic life for us to bear fruit; that our calling into discipleship, our calling into closeness with Christ has been a grace in our life.

You know, to even have been born a Catholic, or converted, these graces that the Lord has made present to us are not just for our sake alone. They're not just for us so that we can become, you know, little entities onto ourselves, and we can be close with Jesus, and just kind of have our friendship. He says in John's gospel ***I have appointed you to bear fruit. I have appointed you to bear fruit.*** And part of the Catholic life, part of what it means to be a baptized Catholic is that, in some way, we are called to the universal mission of the church to become co-laborers in the vineyard with the Blessed Mother and with Jesus to bear fruit in the world, to bring other people to Jesus.

So that can look like a lot of different things, right. There's a multiplicity of different charisms and gifts that have been given to each individual to be part of the body, to build up the body of Christ. But it's a non-negotiable in the Christian life that we're in some way, our own relationship with Jesus is supposed to spill over into the rest of the world. This is the entire point of really the church in some way, the church exists in order to evangelize we're told in the *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Even the word "mass" itself, which is a prayer, right – it's our liturgical prayer – the word "mass" means sent. "Ite, missa est," "The mass ends," right. Now, having received Jesus, and grown in that relationship with Him, you're called to be sent. And so one of the great ways that the mission, the missionaries of the church – and all of us are called to be missional in some sense – our training is in suffering.

You know, I don't think we recognize a lot of times this part of the story, but after Saint Paul has his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he actually goes

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

out into the desert for 3 years to just learn and to suffer and to pray. Even Jesus, entering into His public ministry, right, gives us an example of the 40 days of fasting that He undergoes in the desert in order to prepare for His public ministry, right. There's something in what it means to... One of my favorite musicians is a guy named Josh Garrels, Christian musician, and one of the lines in his songs is "This is how the prophets train," and he's talking about suffering, right. Like, in order to be a prophetic witness to the love of God in the world, we must undergo suffering at some point, right. Because it's in imitation of Christ that we do so, you know. It's... what the entire spiritual life is pushing toward is the turning of our human nature, the divinizing of our human nature – in the Eastern church they call it a theosis – it's this transformation of our nature into God. To be like Christ, to be like God, right. That He is this example of what we are all called to be in this new life.

And that divine grace, the entire... the divine life being poured into our souls, it's the entire point of the sacramental economy, and everything that we can avail ourselves of in the church is all aimed at this transformation of our very nature, body and soul, into the divinity, right, of God. Like to be utterly transformed from the inside out. And the way that God can crack and break into our broken human nature and to remake it into His image is through suffering, is through suffering. And so that transformation, that divinization is for our sake and for our salvation. That's what it means to go to heaven, in a certain sense, is to become perfectly dilated to love of God and love of neighbor, to become like God.

But at the same time, that divinization is given to us for the sake of others, and for the mission of the church. And this is the logic that we're presented with in the gospel, is that that divinization, that transformation of our nature doesn't occur just through our own human efforts, or even just through from moving from glory to glory in our lives. But what Jesus Christ, the image He gives us is that, you know, though He was in the form of God, Christ did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, He emptied Himself, taking the form of the slave and found human in appearance, right. So this whole... one of the original songs of the church that we hear represented in Paul is presenting to us the logic now of how this divinization actually happens. That Jesus Christ is giving us this image that it's in our outpouring and being broken open that we actually become open now to this divine life.

So the same thing is true of our mission. Jesus gives us that great image, that unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains but a single grain. So even in our spiritual lives, as we mature spiritually, as long as we remain just kind of comfortable, maybe even comfortable in our devotional life and comfortable – we've got everything we need, we've got our nice house, and we go to mass every

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

morning, and we say our rosary, and everything is just kind of good, everything's clicking for us – we won't bear the fruit that we're called to bear. It's only in entering into Jesus' suffering that we become available for the mission He wants to send us out on.

I think the great examples of this are found in what I consider to be the 2 greatest saints of the 20th century, which are Saint Mother Teresa (Saint Teresa of Calcutta) and Saint John Paul the Second. So we look at, in a particular way in each of them, their mission is bound up in the sufferings that they've actually encountered in their own lives. So Mother Teresa growing up had these amazing mystical visions at different times of Jesus, really deep encounters with His love. And then at a certain point in her life, Jesus' consolation in her prayer life, the sense that Jesus was near and her soul being filled with divine life was no longer something that was present or available to her. And we hear about this in her book *Come Be My Light*, that she underwent a period of 50 years of darkness where she found it difficult to believe in God even sometimes, to continue in her spiritual life. But she had fallen so in love, she had been so rooted in Jesus that she was able to keep going.

Well, when the secular world heard that they were aghast. You know, "Mother Teresa was a non-believer. She was a doubter, an atheist." Anyone who knew anything about the spiritual life knew that this reality of a dark night of the soul is something that's happened to many saints throughout the years. What's unique about Mother Teresa's mission is that all the fruit that she's bearing, right, in terms of this order, the sisters that she found, the different missions she has in Calcutta, and serving the poor, and the incredible witness she is to the world of what it means to be Catholic, all of that in some way, I'm sure that the fruit of that mission was originated in the darkness that she herself was encountering. It was originally born in the fruit of the darkness of her own prayer life.

And I think it's fitting that Mother Teresa, who was this great light, this great symbol, sign pointing toward God's reality and His existence, as all the saints do – the great proofs that God is real, the great masterpieces of the divine work in our reality – in many ways, she was the symbol to the secular, post-modern nonbelieving world. And ask new atheists, they hate Mother Teresa, they absolutely hate her because she's such a symbol of the fact that God is real, such a sign pointing to that. Like it's fascinating that she would take on in her own way the darkness that's found in so many of these... of so much of the secular world, this unbelieving world, that she herself would suffer interiorly with her own darkness, in a certain sense taking on that mission, you know. It's bound up, they're tied up together.

Pray More Healing Retreat - Transcript

And similarly, John Paul the Second. This is my absolute... my hero is Saint John Paul the Second. I think he's one of the greatest men that ever lived, I really do. I read biographies of him like all the time, I just get so fired up. You can't read about this man's life and not be just amazed at what God accomplished through him. But, you know, loses both of his parents at a young age, lives through Nazi occupation, is in seminary while the Nazis occupy Kraków, where he's living. He then undergoes communist occupation throughout his priesthood and as the bishop of Kraków in Poland, and all of this stuff. So really, like just persistent suffering, you know, throughout his whole life. And then at the end of his life was a beautiful witness to physical suffering, when he struggled with his own illness kind of on the world stage. You know, he was in a certain sense devolving in front of our eyes, physically, we watched him. This one vital man who would ski, you know, as the pope, now becoming old and frail, you know.

And they talk about, that John Paul II, when he would go to pray, he would almost groan inwardly. People who were with him privately for his public masses, that he would groan as he would, you know, like, pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament for several hours every morning, right. There's a closeness and an intimacy there, right, like a being in touch with God that is just otherworldly, and I think in many ways this preparation for his mission, this great father figure, you know, the enemy of... he eventually takes down communism. In many ways, you know, is born, like his sufferings themselves prepare him for this mission. Everything that he walked through is getting him to that moment, that he's going to be this great pope who really, you know, sparks the new evangelization, and sets the church in a way to become missional for the next, you know, several hundred years.

So I think, you know, that's something to discern in your own life, is part of the reason that God is allowing a suffering to persist in your life, is part of the reason is that He's actually calling you to a specific mission, and He's preparing you for that mission. So thanks so much, God bless.