

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2018 - Transcript

### Encountering Christ Within

**Br. Casey Cole**

Peace and good to you. My name is Brother Casey Cole, and we have finally reached the end of our pilgrimage. At least almost. This week, the fourth week of Advent, we are just a few days away from Christmas, the great celebration of the incarnation. And as our readings indicate today, we have a special focus on our Mother Mary today. And so, with that in mind, with her in mind, we pray to begin.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus Christ, You came to be like us and one of us. You chose to take on our flesh by being born of a woman. That woman was Mary. We pray that, through her intercession and example, we may come to be like her, who said yes, who showed faith, and made You present in the world. We pray that in everything we do You may be present. In Your name we pray. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Have you ever met someone who looked exactly like their parents? I mean just a spitting image. You look at them and you know exactly where they came from. I find it amazing. I was at a parish one time and there was this family that just had a look. I met a few of them one day, and then a couple of days later I met another one and I just knew they were of that family. They had the same nose, the same eyes, the same facial features. You could have picked a hundred children and thrown them in a room, and I could have told you which ones were from this family and which ones weren't, even if you wouldn't have told me how many kids they had. That's how striking a resemblance they had.

And how amazing it is that we get to pass these things on: That in this child, you can see the mother; In this child, you can see the father; That these genes, this part of yourself lives on. You can see that other person. And I think in some ways it's kind of a superficial cool thing of "Wow, you look just like your mom. You look just like your dad." But it becomes really profound when one of those people goes away. One of those people becomes deceased. Because when you see that child then, maybe even as an adult, you see those features, it's like you're seeing that friend you once had. It's like seeing that person that's no longer with you. You see the eyes, and they're not just the child's eyes, they're the father's eyes. You see that nose, and it's not just that child's nose, it's the mother's nose. There, in the place that you thought was gone, you see that old friend. You see them living on.

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But in some ways it's more than just the physical features, it's more than just the DNA being passed down. In our children, in those who go after us, in those people that have mothers and fathers, there's a sense of remembrance, a sense of memory, that they knew them best. That, through their mannerisms and their history, the way they act, the way they treat people, they in some ways can actually make that person present. In a very non-superficial way, you can interact with someone and feel the presence of someone who is long gone. They may not be with us in the way they were before, but they're with us. You can see it with your eyes, you can feel it with your heart, you can sense it in the way that they talk, this memory of that person long gone. How powerful that is, to know that our loved ones can live on. That they're made present even when they're not there.

I think of this when I think about the relationship between Mary and Jesus. Mary has the innate ability to make Jesus present to the world. She is the one that gave birth, and so in a very literal sense I imagine they looked like each other. I wonder if He had her nose, or her ears, or eyes, I wonder if people looked at Jesus and were reminded of Mary. There's something physical that she gave Him, something that made Him who He was, and reminded people of Mary. And in fact, the other way around. When people looked at Mary, they were reminded of Jesus. There was a physical nature to it.

But I think it's more than that. I think it's in the way that Mary lived that reminds people of Jesus. She said yes to God in a quite profound way. When the angel Gabriel came to her, she didn't ask difficult questions, she didn't challenge, she didn't push back. She simply said "Yes. I will. May it be done to me according to your word. I am here to serve God." And that's exactly what Jesus did, yes. When He was in the garden, He knew that this was not His will, He knew that this is not what He wanted to do, but the Father's will. And so He showed obedience, He showed His great "Yes."

In Mary's case, there was great tribulation, there was a great risk that she took on. Here was an unwed woman, a child even, who is now pregnant, was with child. Can you imagine the fear that she must have had? Can you imagine what she must have went through in society? She might have hid it, she might have been afraid of what people said, but she said yes. She kept going. She had strength and courage. And so did Jesus. Jesus there on the cross, Jesus there in the garden, Jesus bleeding. This is a major risk for Him. He could have run away, He could have chosen not to do this, but it was a free act for our humanity, a free will offering to save us all. His "Yes" meant something.

I think of the way that Mary lived with joy. I love her Magnificat. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my savior. For He

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has looked with favor on His lowly servant.” When she hears of this great news that she’s going to bear the Lord and savior of the world, she’s fearful for a second, but she is full of joy. She can’t help but break out into song. “This is an amazing experience.” And she goes to her cousin Elizabeth, and she has to share in their great rejoicing together. “How amazing this is.”

She doesn’t complain, she doesn’t share her fear or tribulation. It’s nothing but joy. “How amazing it is that I get to share this with the world.” And even before He’s born, people react to it: Elizabeth is filled with joy, John in her womb is filled with joy and leaps in her womb. Mary is filled with joy, and so is Jesus. Jesus brings joy to the world. In the season of Advent, we remember that He is the prince of peace, He is the joy to the world. That people rejoice when they encounter Him, they call out His name. What an amazing experience it must have been to see Him walking by, to be filled with that joy just as Mary was, to feel your life changed, to feel His presence there within us.

Once again we see a resemblance. We see that Mary is making Jesus the true incarnate joy, present in just her very being. And, of course, they also had a very strong vision of what the world would look like. Mary, again, in her Magnificat calls this rejoicing of how the world is about to be turned upside-down, how the hungry will be fed, the conceited will be cast out, the rich will be thrown from their thrones, but the poor will be lifted up. There will be justice. There will be the kingdom that we all know should be. This is what she proclaimed, this is what she was so emphatic about. This is what she was joyful about.

And, in fact, we see this when we look at Jesus. When we look at Him, we see the turning of the tides. We see a new kingdom coming. We see that the poor are treated with such love and tenderness, and brought into the fold. How amazing it is that we see the resemblance between the 2. Mary truly made Jesus present even before He was born. She made His incarnate nature a part of herself, so that when people saw her they knew. They saw the resemblance even before He was there. And today we see His resemblance in her long after He’s been gone. We see it in the way that she lived, in the way she loved, in the way that she continues to intercede for us.

This is a wonderful example for us. We may not literally give birth to Jesus - that has happened - but we have an incredible opportunity to make Jesus present to the world. In some ways, simply by our very nature we do this. Our scripture tells us that we are created in the image of God, Genesis tells us. That in our very likeness, we bear God’s image. But it’s more than that. Because when we look to scripture, the New Testament, Colossians and Ephesians, the hymns, we see that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation, that all is created through Him, and so that we are actually

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created in His image, and not He in our image. He existed before us, and we are a type of Christ. When people look at us, they see Christ, at least we hope that they do. We bear His image in simply being alive. In simply being human, Christ is present.

But, of course, we also have an opportunity in the way that we live, in the way that we treat other people. I ask people all the time if they feel holy. “Do you think that you’re a holy person?” Most people will say no. “Oh, I’m not holy.” And I push back and they say “No, brother. If you knew what I did, if you knew who I was, you would say I’m not holy.” But there’s a problem with this question, because most people when they think about holiness, they think of their own moral life. They think of who they are as a person. But holiness, honestly, it’s not about me, and it’s not about you. Holiness is about Jesus, about God’s presence. One is holy when Christ lives in them and emanates through them. That is what holiness is.

Pope Benedict says that holiness is love lived to the full. That when we love people, we are in a sense making God known, because God is love. When we live out what Saint Paul says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians what love means - that it’s self-sacrificing, that it doesn’t expect anything in return, that it loves freely - when we do that, we are being holy, because we are giving what is Jesus. Pope Francis in his new Apostolic Exhortation takes this further, and reminds us that when we live like Christ did, when we go to the margins, when we lay down our life for a friend, we are being holy. Why? Not because we’re good people, but because Jesus is good. Because Jesus is holy, and Jesus lives in us. And when we make that imitation known, Jesus is known. And so, once again, we bear a resemblance. The world knows Christ through us.

But there’s yet another way, a way that we all partake in in so many ways, and that is the sacraments. Through our baptism, we were made one with Christ. Yes, the water washed away our sins, but we also had the Chrismation, the oil put upon us. And just as the word Christos, just as the word Messiah means anointed, we were anointed. We were made like Christ. And so, through our baptism and confirmation with the oil, we are made to be once again in the image of Christ, to be holy in the world, to be little examples of Christ, to be little Christ in the world.

And when we receive the Eucharist each and every week, when Jesus comes to be a part of us, we don’t just digest that food and then forget about it. No. Jesus becomes a part of us. We take Him into our body and we digest, and He becomes a part both physically and spiritually, so that when we go out into the world, Jesus is there with us giving us spiritual and physical nourishment, giving us inspiration and strength, giving us courage to live as He did. For no matter what we do, we never do it alone. As baptized, confirmed Christians that received the Eucharist, we

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walk with Christ because Christ walks with us. That intimate union of the incarnation exists within us. What a powerful, powerful thing that we get to do as Christians.

And so as we approach this time of Christmas, just a few days away, and we remember Mary's wonderful example - how she bore Christ in the world, how she gave an amazing resemblance to Him - we are called to follow that example. We are called in everything we do to make sure that the world, when they see us, sees Christ. We do this by our very nature, we do this in the love that we share, we do this in our sacraments, and we do this most of all in the way that we imitate Him. The way we lay down our lives for a friend in humility, and patience, and love.

And so as we conclude this retreat, as we conclude this time of preparing to celebrate Christmas, may we call upon the intercession of our Mother Mary, call upon the one who lived this life before us with great excellence, that we may say yes as she says yes; That we may be humble as she is humble; And that we may bear our Lord in everything we do.

*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are 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.*

Thank you all for joining me on this retreat. I hope that this has been spiritually nourishing for you, and that this celebration of Christmas may be a wonderful occasion for you. Peace and good to you all.