

## Pray More Advent Retreat 2018 - Transcript

### **The Lost Sheep**

**Fr. Kyle Manno**

Alrighty. God is good. We are continuing the journey through this Advent season. We're going to welcome Baby Jesus into the world. Who else is excited? Whoo! I know I am. So again, my name is Father Kyle Manno, I've been a priest now for 2 years. I'm assigned at Newman Center in DeKalb, Illinois, actually where I want to college. Right in this office where I'm at is where I found my vocation. Crazy, full-circle. It was right at this desk. Sturdy. But I was on the other side discovering why God made me, and now I'm a priest. It's crazy.

So I got my music education here, degree here at Northern Illinois. I've been a priest 2 years in a suburb, and now I'm in this college town on the campus as one of the ministers, and then also a vocation director for my diocese. So, excited to be with all of you during this Advent season journeying together, and take this retreat, this short time, to kind of break into our hearts with Jesus Christ, and allow Him to love us.

And so today, our topic is the parable of the lost sheep. I want to read for you Matthew 18, 12 through 14, just very briefly. ***“What is your opinion? If a man has 100 sheep, and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it: Amen I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, is it not the will of your Heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost?”*** I'm going to repeat that. ***“Is it not the will of your Heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost?”*** It seems like an irrational shepherd, right. You've got 100 sheep, 99 are in there, one's lost, and you're going to go and run off for one? One? Alright shepherd, it seems kind of silly, right. It seems silly.

Well, to get our minds around this passage, I want to share with you 2 brief stories. One has to do with my vocation, and the other has to do with my father, my earthly father. And they're 2 stories that really hit home in a beautiful day and, God-willing, will hit close to your own heart, and allow you to discover that God will never stop seeking you out. Because He loves you.

So the first one actually is during my vocation. I was, you know, going to college, getting my music degree, as I just said. And when I was getting my music degree, my original plan before I ever started asking the question about priesthood was “I want to go to college, get my degree in music and piano and trumpet,” and then I was going to graduate, get married, have like 10 kids, maybe a baker's dozen, I

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don't even know. I was going to move to California and just become like a musician. And I wanted to pursue music the rest of my life, and then be happy, right. Music, money, wife, kids, good to go.

And then I was in college, when I was actually meeting with a priest right here, kind of discovering my faith again, rediscovering it - I had a reversion back to the beautiful church - and I would meet with the priest every week, talk about faith, about who I was, identity. And I came in one day and I said "Father, I've been thinking a lot, and I think I want to be a deacon one day." And he was like "Alright, cool." And he didn't seem that impressed, and I was like "Excuse me? This is a big deal. You should be more pumped than this." He said "Well, why don't you think about being a priest, right."

And so I did. I started discerning the priesthood, asking that question, "Could I be a priest?" I had never asked it before. And as I'm asking this question, kind of trying to discover why I was created, and asking the question of how, like, real my discernment was, like how much I was entertaining the question of "Could I be a priest?" I was at the same time in a band, and we could gig about 4 or 5 times a week during the summer, and we were playing a local gig about an hour from here. And we were in a city called Joliet, Illinois, we had a little townie bar called "Just One More."

So in a townie bar, of course, everyone's kind of middle-aged, and they're all the same people, right. Everyone knows everyone. So I'm playing this gig, I'm playing piano at this specific gig, and we have 4 hours to play. And as I'm playing for about 4 hours, we're about an hour and a half in, and I see this guy walk in. And when you play the same music every day for like 4 hours, the same music, you just people-watch, right. You just watch everybody and observe, and you're like "Alright, what's going on over there? Alright, who's that guy? Who's that lady? Who's that dude?" Right, you just people-watch.

So this guy walks in, sits down at the bar, the bartender immediately gives him his drink, and you can tell everyone knows this guy, right. We'll call him Mike. He's the Mike of the bar, right. Everyone knows Mike. And as he's sitting there, he's talking and making jokes and laughing, and he's facing me, but not facing me, right. He's in my direction, but he's talking to the woman next to him, clearly trying to pick her up, and he's laughing and he's joking, having a good time. But what's interesting is I kept watching Mike laugh, and have a good time, and drink his beer, and he was facing me. I saw his eyes. Something in his eyes struck me, and I was like "Hmm." His eyes seemed lifeless. Like they looked dead.

And even though he's laughing, even though he's joking around, he's got a smile, he looks empty. And all of a sudden, as I watched him more and more and more,

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seeing his empty eyes, I saw a lost person. And all of a sudden this passage popped into my mind: He's like a sheep without a shepherd. And I was like "Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's what he is. A sheep without a shepherd." Meaning he wants to be loved, he wants happiness, but he doesn't know where to go. So he goes to this bar every week, and every Friday, every Saturday trying to fill up this place in his heart, trying to be loved, maybe drinking excessively, making out, maybe having a one-night-stand. But he wakes up in the morning more and unhappy, more lost. But this is the only place he knows, so he comes right back, trying to fill the void.

And as I looked at him, I was like "Oh my gosh. That's so sad. Who is going to help him? Who is going to help that poor man?" And all of a sudden this little voice popped in my mind like "Maybe you." Me. Maybe I could be that person. Because who else is going to tell him? Who is going to tell him the truth? And I had to play for 2 more hours, but as I left the bar that night I thought "Yeah. There's thousands of us, millions of us, billions of us like him, walking around lost. Putting on the happy face, but we're empty. We're lost. We're like sheep without a shepherd. Who's going to give us the truth?"

So I recognize that this call, this question of "Could I be a priest?" was deeper than I thought. And the more I prayed, the more I recognized that that's at the core of my being. All I want to do in life is help people discover that they need a savior. Help people discover that they are a lost sheep, and they need a divine shepherd. So I went to seminary, and I got to seminary, and about 5 months in my father got very ill, very sick. And he was sick in the hospital for about 2 years, and he was essentially paralyzed the entire time. He couldn't move, he couldn't speak. None of that.

And I would go to the hospital pretty much every day and sit with my dad. And I remember this one time very specifically, I was sitting there - It was about 5 months into him being paralyzed - and I was looking at him, and I was sitting with my siblings, and we were all kind of talking, and we were just actually just reminiscing about my dad, and we were having a good time. We were laughing, talking about a lot of his funny moments. And all of a sudden, as we sat there, I was almost like having this moment outside of myself where we were all laughing, having a good time, and I saw my dad, who couldn't speak, right. He couldn't even laugh. And, all of a sudden, I saw us, who could laugh, who could move, who could speak, and we were taking it for granted, right. Like, it was so easy for us to do anything. And then there's my dad, who's paralyzed. He can't do anything for himself.

And all of a sudden I realized that, right, we were praying every day for a miracle, we were. And if my dad, who was, like, almost, right, 6 feet in the ground, if he

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one day got better, if he one day went home, we were going to have the biggest party ever, right. Now, here we are, like these healthy people, and we take for granted that we can walk, that we can move, that we can speak, that we can do whatever we want, right. We're healthy, but nobody's having a party. We don't have a party because we're doing good. But if my dad, if he went home, was healed of this sickness, you know we would have had the biggest party ever. I would have put the streamers up, right, got those things in the air, got the drinks out, because he was at the edge of death. We didn't celebrate for our health, but we would have celebrated for his.

And so all of a sudden, as I sat there looking at us and looking at him, I thought of this passage, right, rejoicing over the one that's saved. And all of a sudden it made sense to me. Nobody celebrates over those who are saved or healthy. What they celebrate is over those who are close to death and come back to life, right. And when I think of those 2 moments, with seeing the man in the bar and seeing my dad - who eventually did die, right, but we rejoiced over him entering heaven, entering the Kingdom of the Lord - is that each one of us has this part of our heart that's dying. That's very, very lost. So distant from God. And it's the part of our heart that is most lost that God wants to love, right. It's the most broken part, the most lost part of our heart that Jesus Christ is trying to seek out. And He will find you, He will seek you out, He will not stop. And the second He ravishes your heart, the second He gets into that part of your heart that's most lost, ooh, all of heaven and earth is going to rejoice.

And so what is it in your heart that is most lost? What is it in your heart that you feel like has no hope? What is it in your heart that feels like it's 6 feet under, at the edge of death, and you've lost all hope? Because it's right there where the God of the universe wants to go. It's right there He wants to be your shepherd. Don't be afraid to recognize that you are the lost sheep. I'm the lost sheep. We all are. But when we recognize we're lost, then we can be found. So I encourage you today, after we finish this time together, just to spend about 10 minutes in prayer, and ask God "God, find me. Find me."

*Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord, Heavenly Father, send Your blessings down upon these, Your children. Let them recognize that they are in search of You, that they want to be found, and You are in search of them. Bring to light the parts of their heart that feel most dead, the parts of their heart that feel most lost, and find them. Find the lost sheep. In the name of the Almighty God, bless you. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless you all.*