

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Prayer, Penance and Almsgiving

Jon Leonetti

Hey everybody, Jon Leonetti here. Alright, one thing you're going to know about me really quick is that I talk fast. I'm a radio host, that's what I do every single morning for an hour. And so I'm trained to fit a lot of stuff in a very short amount of time, and that's what I'm going to do here. So I hope you can take notes. If there's one or two things that really just kind of stay with you, let the Holy Spirit work, alright. Alright, this topic is going to be entitled "Reordering our lives back to God," and I think there's three central components if we are going to start to reorder our lives back to God. And let me also just say that this is not just a one-time thing, alright. This is not just a one time during Lent thing. This is an everyday thing, and these three things that you're going to find are very practical and things that you and I can plug into our lives, can implement on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, okay.

So we want to reorder our lives back to God. First and foremost, why is that most important? Well, it's because chaos, sin, has created disorder in all of our lives, right. And what that does primarily is gets us focused or worshipping on all the things that are less than us. So what does a chaotic life look like? It looks like a life that is ordered towards everything that is less than us. Write that down if you haven't. What do I mean by less than us?

So in the bible, Genesis, God says... creates Adam, of course, and Eve, and they are the highest point of His creation, which means that everything else in the world is lower than man and woman. Okay, so we know that for a couple of reasons - One, Adam is given authority or dominion over all of creation. So he's given authority to name the birds of the air and the beasts of the sea, okay. That's important. And also, the second way we know that is because we are the only ones made in His image and likeness. Nothing else in the world is made in God's image and likeness, but we are. So that tells us pretty much how important the human person really is, which is why the Catholic church is obsessed with life issues, from the moment of conception until natural death.

Okay, so what does a disordered, chaotic life look like? It looks like when we order ourselves to all of the things, the other things, the lower things that God has created. And we order ourselves in the way of which we worship them, or they become like idols or Gods to us. That is what a chaotic life looks like. And you may say "Okay, just the bad things?" No, even the good things can become disordered in our lives.

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I'll give you an example. I'm a big Cubs fan, alright. So anyone watching this in Chicago - I'm in Des Moines, Iowa - but anyone watching this in Chicago, you get me here. I remember the 2016 world series. It was incredible, right. It was the highest point of my sports love, and I went to game 1 of the NLCS against the Dodgers and it was awesome. I was speaking in Chicago the next day, so I went a day early, on a Saturday, and I got one ticket to the game. And I sat in the outfield, in the bleacher seats - if you've ever been to a Cubs game, you've got to sit in the bleachers - and I sat out there, and I remember it was bottom of the eighth, 4-4, the bases were loaded, Miguel Montero was up to the plate.

And I look over at the guy to the next to me and I said "If Miguel Montero hits a home run here, I'm going to give you a hug." And he started laughing and he says "Man, this whole place is going to go crazy if something happens." And the next swing of the bat, I kid you not, Miguel Montero hit a grand slam to deep right field. And everyone was going insane. It was incredible. And of course the Cubs made their run and they went on to win the World Series, and I still remember, you know, close to midnight sitting there watching Kris Bryant, the third baseman, throw that ball to Anthony Rizzo. Slowly rising, my wife and I were going nuts in the middle of our family room. It was one of the coolest experience in sports of my life.

But I'll never forget about 10 minutes after that what happened. I look over at my wife, and about 10 minutes later I said "I want to win next year too. That was so awesome, I want them to win next year, and the following year, and the following year." You see how that kind of tells us a little bit what I'm talking about? What do I mean by that story? See, the world offers us more - 10 steps to a better you, or 152 steps to the life you've always dreamed. But God, friends, God is enough. Right there from sacred scriptures, out of the lives of the saints over and over again. You know, St. Teresa of Ávila would repeat this constantly, John Paul the Second would repeat this. God is enough.

Write down those three words: God is enough. If there's nothing that you hear over my talks or this retreat that you're going on this Lent, I want you to remember those three words: God is enough. That is why it is so crucial for us to reorder our life back to God, because with the world, and even created goods, we're always going to be thirsty for more. And it doesn't mean they're bad in and of themselves, it just means we have to put them in their proper perspective. God is always the very foundation of our lives, and so we have to constantly be reordering our lives to Him.

So how does that look? What does that look like? Number one, prayer. Okay, I've said it before, I think I said it two years ago when I did the Advent Retreat: Faith

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without prayer is a hobby. Faith without an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus, friends, is nothing but a hobby, and that's important for us to be able to know, okay. So that's number one. We have to have a time for prayer, that's how prayer is spelled: T-I-M-E. So we make time in our schedules. And when I say make time in our schedules, I truly mean make time in our schedules. That means set, you know, blocking off and protecting like 10 minutes a day, 15, 20 minutes a day. Whatever it is. If you're kind of a beginner, if you don't have that established prayer life yet or disciplined prayer time, you can start, but just start with about 10 minutes.

And where do you go? I want you to start creating a place in your home. Create some sacred space in your home. You know, when I grew up my mom had a little two-tiered table, and it's still there in her home. Mom and dad, we would gather around there whenever we prayed as a family. And we didn't pray a ton as a family, but when we prayed as a family we were there in front of that table. What was on the table? The bible, there was a crucifix, there were different saint statues, and there's been a lot more things that have accumulated over time, different devotionals and rosaries. But what's important is we had that place for our family, we had that place for ourselves.

So I want you to establish some sort of sacred space in your home. That is key and crucial. And bonus points if you get a priest that comes over and blessed it, okay. So you establish a time. Why do we schedule it? We schedule it because it's important. You and I don't put things on our schedule that's not important. So if it's important, we pray. And if all of this is true that we're talking about, and I believe it is 100% - and you probably do too, otherwise you wouldn't be watching these - then it has to be the most important thing of our life.

Again, faith without prayer is a hobby. It's meaningless. There's a difference between knowing about God, which is good, but knowing God, which is better. Write that down: There's a difference between knowing about God, which is good - this is good, what we're doing here, studying God, reading and learning theology. But knowing God, that's better. And the studying of God always funnels into knowing God, at least it always should, okay. So that's important for us to be able to get. So we schedule it because it's important.

And I want you to give God the best part of your day. Do not schedule it when you're most tired, groggy, angry, anxious, stressed, alright. Give God the time you're most alive. I don't have my prayer time before my first cup of coffee, okay. I don't have my prayer time before I have something in my stomach in the morning to eat. Why? Because all I'm thinking about is breakfast and coffee otherwise. So, you know, we can be practical about this and, you know, give God the best part of

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your day. Don't just give Him the leftovers. Are we going to give Him the times that we're tired, angry, groggy, anxious? Of course we are, and those are good to be able to give to God as well. But that established, disciplined prayer time is something that every saint had in common. And if you and I want to be saints - I want to be a saint, I hope you do too; anyone in heaven is a saint, so if you want to be a saint you want to go to heaven - then we have to have that time with the Lord Jesus in prayer, okay. Make that time. Establish a place.

Then what do I say? What do I say? Start with silence, okay. Silence is the language of God. That's John of the Cross. God's first language is silence. So start there. You know, I mean, you don't have to give God or, you know, tell God all of these things that, you know, you think need to be done. In some ways, beautiful prayer isn't just kind of yelling at God, or telling Him all of the things that He needs to be doing, or being His consultants, right, it's allowing Him to take us over. And that's the difference between meditation and contemplation. I'm reaching to Him in meditation, and in contemplation He reaches back to me. You know, He gives me the graces that I need. That's why the most powerful prayer the saints prayed is "Thy Will be done, Lord." So don't feel like you have to fill up this time with all of these things - in fact, Jesus specifically warns against that - and instead just be there. Give yourself to Him. "Lord, here I am. I ask You to work in me. Give me what You know I need here. I'm open, I'm receptive, I trust You." That is a beautiful prayer.

And again, there's going to be times for petitionary prayers and other times, you know, for many other different forms there's no doubt, and there's going to be times when we need to go to God for our needs. But what we're doing primarily there is just giving Him permission, permission to work in our life, permission to work in this one area, or in this other person's life, - because we're all connected, we are one body, right. Okay. So that is number one. Prayer. And when we talk about reordering our lives to God, the most important thing: Prayer.

Number two: Penance. We talk a lot about this during Lent or Advent. Why do we talk about it then? I don't know. I mean, they're good times for us to click reset, right. And we all need a reset. What's the ultimate reset in our lives? Confession, penance, reconciliation. It's the only sacrament with three names. Call it what you will. We'll call it penance here, alright. That is the key. That's the reset for us as Catholics. And if you look at every saint, every saint went there. John Paul the Second went to confession every Friday, Mother Teresa went every other day. What did she do? Mother Teresa went every other day to confession. Archbishop Fulton Sheen said that hearing a nun's confession is like being stoned to death by popcorn. I love that line, right. But think about how important, how holy they were, and how much they still knew they needed it.

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So what does confession do? It, by the very authority of the priest - we know this. That's why he says "Acting in persona Christi capitis," the church says, in the very person of Jesus Christ the head, he says, speaking in the first person, "I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Where does he get that from authority but from Christ Jesus Himself? Where does it come from? Right there when Jesus rose from the dead, and He takes the apostles, who are his successors... the bishops are the successors of the apostles, so an unbroken line all the way down, and He says to them "Go." Gives them a clear directive. "Go forgive sins. Those sins you forgive are forgiven. Those sins you retain are retained." And what did they do? But they go and they forgive sins.

And He says this: "Those who hear you hear Me." Again, that's why the priest speaks in the first person, "I absolve you." That's actually why the priest wears the stole as that authority, that's what symbolizes his authority, acting in the very person of Jesus Christ the head, to forgive us our sins. And for 2,019 years, this is what His priests have done for us, which is why you and I have to take advantage of this, okay. And this should not be just once a Lent, once an Easter sort of thing.

This is something that I think we should make a part of our routine, every four to six maybe eight weeks, be important. You know, the church requires one time a year during Easter season, in the state of mortal sin. But we are not minimalists, okay. That means that we're not going to clean our house once a year, we're not going to clean our car once a year - though if you look at my car you'd probably think I did - and we're not going to clean our souls once a year.

So find a good confessor, or someone that you know, a good priest. And I do mean someone that you know and someone that knows you, okay. And sometimes, you know, we go to priests we don't know, and that's just kind of what we do, kind of hop around. I just... I think that can be a mistake in the spiritual life. Because we want people to walk with us, to come to know us, to understand, and then to help us, and to see things in ways that we can't maybe see them. And that's what a good confessor does, or a good spiritual director as well, going to confession afterwards if he's a priest. Alright, just like you're not going to switch doctors when you go to, you know, the physician. Everyone has their doctor. You're not going to switch counsellors when they start getting to know you. And the same thing with our priests.

So God has given them the very authority to save souls through that sacrament. That's incredible. So if you've been away from the sacrament of confession for a while, you know what? Don't worry about the past. The devil lives in your past. But I want you to worry about now. I want you to think about now, and I want you to go there, alright. And just remember, no matter how long you've been away, no

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matter what you've done, God's ready to forgive. It's a beautiful thing. Prayer, penance, those are two key components to reordering our life to God.

And then alms giving. So, a lot of times in Lent we talk about alms giving, and what I've found is three fourths of the people don't know what we mean. So let's define alms giving. What is it? Well, it's giving something of ourselves - oftentimes we say time, talent, treasure - for the good of another in charity, for their sake, not because we get anything out of it, okay. We'll go through time, talent, treasure really quick. Time, our most precious commodity. It's not money. Our most precious commodity is time. I told you, that's how we spell prayer, that's what God loves more than anything, is our time. Time spent with Him in prayer, first and foremost, most important. Time spent with our families, with each other, right. That quality time. Time spent volunteering, or helping out at your parish. Time is a big gift that you and I can give. And sometimes we say, well, we're too busy to do this or that for our church, we're too busy to pray. Then you're too busy, alright. Time is important. You've got to make that time for God.

Talent, right. You and I have been given incredible gifts. And sometimes they really, you know, to the world may not seem like they're all incredible or anything, and that's okay. Whatever it is you've been given, then do, you know. I mean, Thomas Aquinas talked about this. Look out into the world, look out into your community, look out into your parish, look out into your family, look out into your block that you live on and find a need. Find some kind of need. And then look into your heart and find if God has given you the gift, the talent, to be able to fulfill that need. And if He has, go do it. Go do it. Offer yourself, your talent, for that cause.

And finally, treasure. Whatever it is, whatever amount of money. I work for a Catholic radio station, Iowa Catholic Radio, and what I do is I do their morning show. And I also am on air for our Care-A-Thon, and it's always just an incredible time where people call in and they give donations. And we've had \$500 donations, \$1,500 donations, \$5,000 donations, a ton of super generous people. Like, super generous, outrageously generous.

But I'll never forget a phone call I got from a woman that was in a Master's Degree for art at one of the colleges nearby. And she calls up and she gave \$5. \$5 is what she gave. I get the goosebumps just even talking about it. And she said to tell the people on the air if a struggling art student can give to the station, then anyone can. And that, to me, that \$5 I'll never forget. You know, I will never forget that call that we had. Why? Because she didn't give out of her want, she gave out of her need, and it was that important to her.

Now, no one's asking you to be irresponsible here, no question about it. But who among us can't give maybe \$5, or \$10? A little bit extra maybe to our parish if

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there's some cause, some good cause in our faith. So all of them are important - time, talent, and treasure, alms giving, giving of ourselves, prayer. Faith without prayer is a hobby. Establish that prayer life. And then the sacrament of reconciliation, there it is, penance, there it is, the reset for our lives. If we want to reorder our lives back to God, start with those three places, alright. God bless you, talk to you soon.