

## Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

### **Saints Who Had a Devotion to the Passion of Jesus**

#### **Jon Leonetti**

Hey everybody, Jon Leonetti here. So, this talk is entitled “Saints who meditated on the passion of Jesus Christ.” And I’m going to talk about three saints - well, two saints and one blessed - that I think you and I can really learn a lot from. Where to begin but with the saint that changed it all for me. St. Padre Pio, also known as Padre Pio, or course. He died in 1969, and is probably one of Italy’s most famous saints. They joke that the trinity in Italy is God the Father, Mother Mary, and Padre Pio. If you ever go over to Italy his picture is everywhere, and rightfully so. He was a Capuchin priest, a Franciscan who had the stigmata.

And so when I talk about and think about meditating on the passion of Jesus, it’s one thing to kind of put our minds there, but it’s another thing where your body manifests those very wounds and you become kind of a living embodiment of the cross in a lot of ways, of Christ Jesus here on earth. And when I think of Padre Pio, that’s what I think of. One who completely and totally gave his life over to Christ Jesus and especially, in a very real way, the passion, and felt those very pains of the wounds.

Now, I think it’s important for us, especially when we talk about Padre Pio, to kind of take a couple of steps back and figure out why it is that Padre, why it is that Padre Pio had such a devotion to this passion of our Lord. And it, again, manifests itself over the course of many years on his body. Well, number one, and I think this is the most important, is because it’s there that, by which, that our Lord saved us, through the cross, that you and I are saved. What do we mean when we say Jesus saves us in the crucifixion of the cross? What it means is He saves us from everything that makes us miserable. Sin. That He gives us an opportunity now to cooperate with His grace, to go there as well, in order for us to be able to have our lives changed, renewed, reordered towards Him. We cooperate with His grace, insofar as we’re willing to take up our cross daily and follow Him.

You know, when Jesus says to the apostles “If you want to come after Me, you’re going to take up your cross daily and follow Me.” They knew exactly what He was talking about, because they knew crucifixion all too well. They were surrounded with it in a lot of ways. And a lot of times the Romans... they would actually line their streets up with the crucified. It was the ultimate source of execution, *excruciēs*, out from the cross, where we get “excruciating.” That they would have to literally push themselves out from the cross just to breathe, to take their next breath.

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So we have here something of not... not of little importance, but really, in a lot of ways, everything when it comes to our faith. We have a God who went there to die for us. God died for you and I. And this is why I think, in a lot of ways, that St. Paul talks about the stumbling block of the cross. Because, to the world, that doesn't make sense. To the world, that's a totally different idea than they have of what love really is. So a philosophical, heady definition of love is to will the good of the other as other, okay. To will the good of the other as other. Where I want what's good for you for your sake, because it's good for you.

You know, none of this "You owe me," or "You scratch my back, I scratch yours." Love is a complete emptying of oneself. And here in the cross we find our God, who empties Himself. Empties Himself. Walking 10 football fields with that tree on His back by the way, and scourged, 39 lashes at the pillar. 40 was execution. And these whips were laced with bone fragments and hooks. So this is what our Lord went through. And the crown of thorns that, of course, He wore went all the way through His skull. And one - from the Shroud of Turin, as we know - went through his eye.

So the importance of this here for us as Catholics is everything. He empties Himself for you and me, whereby teaching us. Kind of this is the school of love, as St. Maximilian Kolbe said, teaching us how our lives have to be now too. That our lives are no longer just about us. That our lives are to love, to love one another as God has loved us. How did He love us? He emptied Himself for us. He didn't have to, doesn't gain anything from it. That's why it's love, because He gives.

And so that's important for us to remember when we're talking about any of the saints that we're talking about today. But especially Padre Pio, because he wanted his life to be one of self-sacrifice, one of complete gift, and that's what he was. He was self-sacrificing to the different priests of his order. In fact, he would constantly pray for them. And the prayers were so powerful that Satan would come into his room, do everything he could to get him to quit praying for his priests. Because he loved his brother priests, even those that didn't like him, even those that persecuted him, he still loved them.

And of course, as his popularity grew, people started coming from all over, he started offering his life for them. Where did he go? Where did he spend most of his time? The confessional. 18 hours a day. Can you imagine? And he had a certain charism in that confessional where he was able to read people's souls. He could tell you your sins before you told him your sins. And if you ever forgot one, he made sure to remind you. Okay, so he's living his life here completely self-sacrificing. It's not about him. Because if it's about him, he ain't spending 18 hours a day in the confessional, right. He's just not. He's going to go out and do whatever he

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wants. But he knew life was way more important than that, and he knew that the gifts God had given him, primarily this incredible gift of the stigmata, now he was to plug in and become that living embodiment. So, oftentimes he would remind people to meditate on this passion, to meditate on the crucifixion, and of course as he did as well, being that living embodiment.

The second saint that I want to talk about is St. Rita of Cascia. She's one of my patron saints. She was a wife, a mother, a widow, and a nun. You got it. A wife, a widow, a mother, and a nun. And her story is powerful. I don't have the time to be able to go through the whole thing, but I'll tell you, read it. She is the St. Jude of women. She's the patron saint of hopeless cases, which is why she's one of my patron saints, right.

And so she gives us, in a lot of ways, so much to be able to chew on. But I want to just talk about one thing. She also had the stigmata, but the stigmata she had actually was the thorn in her forehead. In fact, oftentimes when you see different icons of her or if you see different images of her, you'll see a crucifix, and then from that a light coming from Christ Jesus' crown of thorns. And would puncture in her forehead, there manifested itself a thorn. This was what she believed to be the dearest gift that she could be given by God. In fact, she asked for some form of feeling the pains that He felt on the cross.

I'm not asking for that gift. I don't know if you've asking for that gift. If you are, you're probably a lot holier than me and a lot holier than most people watching. But that just shows you who and what she was. And it happened. God granted that prayer. In fact, there were times that it would be so ugly that her sisters didn't want to even look at it. They would just ask her to go into her room. There would be times where it would smell horrible, and there would be times where, yes, people would make fun of her because of it, even her own religious sisters. Some of them just couldn't take it. And you think of that, I mean, that's just kind of a whole new level, but this is what she went through. This was what she wanted, and this was what she meditated and had her life on, where she lived that self-emptying, that gift of self.

I'll give you one example, my favorite story when it comes to St. Rita. She was traveling to Rome with her sisters, and as she was on her way they didn't - they were very poor - they didn't have a place to stay when they were there. And Rita was walking, and sister Rita looked down and she found a gold coin in a little stream that they were walking through. And she was behind the pack, she didn't have a lot of friends in the order. And when she looked down, she picked up. And all the sisters were going crazy, they were celebrating, because that gold coin was

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going to be able to house them while they were in home seeing the Holy Father. She put it in her pocket and she kept going.

And a little while later, a little while later it's said that she took that coin out of her pocket and she threw it as far as she could downstream, and it was gone. And the sisters, they couldn't take it. They were crushed by it, getting very angry at her for it. And she apologized so much, and she was crying, and she said to her sisters, she said "My dear sisters," she said "I'm sorry, but I could not take another step with the weight of the coin any longer." That that coin was too heavy. You see, for Rita, when it comes to the passion, what does it do? But it empties her of things of the world. That she loved that poverty that she had. A poverty of material things, but also a poverty of spirit, where she was constantly emptying herself in order to be able to make room for God. That's what the passion does, and that's why Rita made it a point constantly to be able to meditate on that passion of our Lord. And, of course, He gifted her that small gift of a thorn, to be able to continually remember and feel a little bit of the weight that He felt on that cross.

And finally, this is a blessed. So he's not a saint yet, but he was just beatified, of course. This is Blessed Solanus Casey, and I've been to his tomb where I was able to see it. It's kind of in a big glass case, and he's down in the ground in his tomb. And I was able to see his vestments when I was in Detroit, and go around seeing, you know, the different pictures of him and his family and his religious order. It was really, really moving. In fact, at the foot of his casket there's a basket where you can place your intentions, because he was called the Wonder Worker. There were so many different miracles that were attributed to him while he was alive, and many more now that he has died.

But he had a very special devotion to the passion of Jesus. In fact, he had five rules for holiness. I won't go into all of them, I'll just go into one. I believe it's the third rule, but I know it's a rule for sure. It was meditating on the passion of our Lord. That was so important to him. But, you see, one of the things that he did, and though he had a lot of miracles surrounding him, is he wanted to do it in a very small way. So he would take that passion with him into the everyday little annoyances of everyday life, constantly offering them, just like Christ Jesus offers Himself for us, that he is constantly offering these little things, sacrifices, whatever they are, back to our God.

He was the porter, so he was known for opening and closing the door, welcoming people and giving people blessings as they left. He was known for dressing the altar. But everything he wanted to be perfect, everything in his life was that offering to Almighty God. And it stemmed from this, the passion. That if God

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would give His entire self to us, how much more should we now give our entire selves back to God?

So I tried to pick three practical instances. And, in some ways - you know, obviously you're not probably going to be walking around with the stigmata - but you see the importance of it, and it teaches us something nonetheless: That their bodies wear it and, of course, with Blessed Solanus Casey, that his mind was constantly there, alright. Meditate on the passion of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and read those three saints and blessed's lives. God bless you. I'll talk to you soon.