

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Getting to Know Jesus Better This Lent

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Hi, I'm Emily Stimpson Chapman. And today I'm excited to be talking to you about how we can get to know Jesus better this Lent. First, though, I want to say a quick prayer to the Holy Spirit. *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Come, Holy Spirit. Fill the hearts of thy faithful, and enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and we shall be recreated and you shall renew the face of the earth.*

So, as I mentioned, today we are going to talk about getting to know Jesus better during this holy season of Lent. And yes, I know some of you might be thinking "Isn't Lent a season of repentance? Shouldn't that be the focus of my Lent? Telling Jesus how sorry I am for my sins and bad habits and working on overcoming them?" Yes, and no. I will explain.

Lent is a season of repentance. It is why we begin the season with Ash Wednesday, and we go to church, and we have our foreheads marked with ashes. By walking around on an ordinary Wednesday, with a black cross on our heads, we are telling the world "I am a sinner. I have broken faith with God and I want to do better." There really is only one way to do better though. There is only one path that is going to lead us away from sin and that path is Jesus Christ. He is, as John's gospel tells us, **"the way, the truth, and the life."** And that is why repentance is never just a turning from sin. It's also a turning towards Jesus.

So let's talk for just a minute about repentance. The Church's understanding of repentance comes first from the Old Testament. So, the word the ancient Israelites used to talk about repentance was 'Shub', which is a Hebrew word that I think I'm pronouncing right, but it always implies a two-fold movement. So, you have a turning from and a turning to. You've always got to be facing something, right? And in the Old Testament, God is always calling the Israelites to turn from facing their false idols and turn back to facing him. So, in asking of them to repent, what God is asking the Israelites to do, is to stop being ruled by sin and instead be ruled by him.

In the New Testament, the Apostles and the Evangelists built on this idea of 'shub' using the Greek word 'metanoeo'. The original meaning of 'metanoeo' is to change one's mind. So, like with shub, there's a turning. First you believe one thing and then you turn from that belief to another. The New Testament authors though, used

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

the term to show how divine revelation leads us to that turning. How it leads us to a deeper awareness of God. So, it's because God has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ, that we turn from sin and towards Jesus. In other words, repentance doesn't just happen. Repentance always happens in the context of a relationship. So, people turn from sin because God has shown himself to us. He has shown us that there is an alternative to sin, and it is Him. It is love.

God has shown us his love and his mercy and his wisdom and justice, and so when we're looking at sin and we're looking at God, it is no contest which is better. It's like what Moses said to the Israelites in Deuteronomy when they stood at the border of the Promised Land. Each of us has two paths before us. Life and Death. Blessing and Curse. God and Sin. And we get to choose which one rules us. We get to choose which path we're going to follow. Real repentance, real metaneo, always involves both terms. Simply turning from sin isn't enough. We also have to turn towards Jesus. We have to entrust ourselves and our lives to him. And the more we do that, and the more we come to know and understand who God is and what he asks of us, the more we're going to seek to conform to that, the more we're going to seek to conform to Jesus.

And that is why Lent isn't just about us telling Jesus "We're sorry for our sins." It is coming to know Jesus better, so we can love him better and not just turn from the things that are holding us back from holiness, but run from them, full out sprint away from them into the arms of Jesus.

But, how? How do we spend the next 40 days not just thinking about the chocolate we've given up? But about Jesus Christ our God and Savior, how do we get to know him better? Basically, we do what the Church says. We pray. We fast. We give alms. And we invite Jesus into all of it.

So, take prayer. there's lots of different prayers we can take on during Lent. We can decide that we're going to pray the rosary every day, or go to daily mass or Eucharistic adoration. We could pray the Liturgy of the Hours. We could participate in the Station of the Cross. You get the picture. The list goes on. All are good. All are helpful, and all are going to reveal something about Jesus to us. But, whatever form of prayer you've committed to this Lent, I want to encourage you to begin it and end it by looking at a crucifix. And when I say look, I don't mean glance. Like "Hey Jesus, there you are. Gonna go pray the rosary now!" No. What I mean is look, like stare, contemplate, gaze on the crucifix like you gaze on the face of your sleeping baby or a spouse or a dying parent whose face you're never going to see again in this life. Just study Jesus' face, ask him "Who are you?" Look at him on the Cross and wonder at him and wonder at what he is going through.

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

One of the things that I like to do is close my eyes and just imagine I'm there with him on Calvary with my head resting on his feet. But whatever you do, whatever time you've got, whether it's 30 seconds or a minute or 5 minutes, spend that time hanging out in your heart with Jesus on the Cross. Unite your heart to his, in his time of greatest suffering, and the more you do this, the more of his love he's going to reveal to you. The more trust and confidence he will pour into your soul. And the more you'll start to see him not as the world tells you to see him or the Devil tells you to see him or our fears make him out to be, but as he really is. So, that's the first thing. Just pray, but begin and end those prayers by contemplating Christ on the cross.

Second thing the Church calls us to do is fast. But as you fast, invite Jesus into it. So when you're hungry, think about Jesus hungering both in the desert and on the Cross. When you are tempted to break your fast, wherever it is, ask Jesus to feed you with his Grace and his Love. And when you are struggling with your fast, remember that every hunger, every desire, save for one, is insatiable. We're never going to be truly filled by bread or wine or music or television or clothes or sex. We are always going to want more. We are always going to get hungry or bored or curious again. Those constant desires, though, they're there pointing us to Jesus, who is the one our soul truly hungers for. Only he can fill us totally and completely and forever.

So, when fasting for something, let your hunger or your boredom or your frustration in that thing's absence, help direct your gaze back to Him. Fasting is not supposed to be some Olympic contest of willpower. It is not just us gritting our teeth and proving to God how disciplined we can be. It is also not dieting. If your Lenten fast is about you losing weight, you are doing it wrong. Fasting is about reminding ourselves who we are. That we are creatures who are needy and dependent and weak. Fasting is about drawing closer to the hungry and suffering Christ. And fasting is about remembering who that hungry suffering Christ is. He is our Savior and our God and the word from whom all things were made and he is the only one who can ever really fill us.

So, get to know Jesus better this Lent. Pray before the suffering Christ. Fast with the suffering Christ. And lastly, give alms to the suffering Christ. Give to the poor, sick, the suffering, and all of those who Jesus said is his face in the world. If you are already giving more generously to the poor this Lent, that's good. If you are writing a bigger check to your parish, or a religious community, or a local organization that helps out the poor or people in crisis, that's really good. Jesus said whoever gives to the least of these, is giving to him.

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

But, this Lent, don't just write a check. Try to find one day out of 40 plus days, where you talk to Jesus by talking to his poor. That could mean volunteering at a food pantry or a soup kitchen. It could mean standing outside of Planned Parenthood and praying for the scared women who are going inside. It also could mean that when someone asks you for money in the street, you give it to them. But, you don't just walk away. Instead, ask them their name. You know or tell them yours and ask if a few questions about their story, but whatever you do don't treat the poor like they're objects to be feared. You know like you have to keep your distance from them so you don't become like them or catch what they've got. Just see the poor as people with a soul and a story. Listen to them. Look them in the eye and ask God to show you his face in theirs. It's there. You're going to see it. Jesus promised us that. He's true to his word.

In faith, like in life, I think there's this really human tendency to think we always have to reinvent the wheel. You know, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that there must be some new and better path to growing and holiness. Or some really innovative way to get to know Jesus better. But, usually when we let ourselves think that way we're over-complicating things. One of the great things about being Catholic is that we don't have to reinvent the wheel. We have God, himself, telling us in his own words how to come to know him better. We also have 2 thousand years worth of saints and doctors and theologians testifying to the efficacy of God's methods. The Saints tell us that prayer and fasting and alms giving work. If we enter into the traditional practices of Lent with a spirit of faith and hope and love, there is no way we're not going to come out on the other side without knowing Jesus better. And that is because Jesus wants you to know him, right. He wants you to turn to him. He wants you to be with him, so he has laid out a path that children and uneducated peasants and really busy men and women living in the 21st century can follow.

Getting to know Jesus better during Lent is not rocket science. It's not easy, but it's not complicated. It is simple. Pray, fast, give alms and let God do the rest. Let's close with a prayer. *In the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. Amen. Dear Lord Jesus, Thank you for this holy season of Lent. Please help us to turn from everything that is holding us back from you and run straight into your arms. Give us a spirit of faith, hope, and love as we pray and fast and give alms, and draw us closer to be you by the time Easter Sunday comes. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*