

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

12- Pete Burak Jesus Wants Our Conversion Continuously

Hi I'm Pete Burak, let's pray. *In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Lord Jesus helps us to know You. Help us to hear Your call. Help us to experience You passing by and extending a hand and making eye contact and saying our name and saying those beautiful words, "Follow me." Lord help us to hear that call today and then give us the grace to respond to it, Amen. In the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

Do you ever had those experiences where it's like life was going one way and then it's just different, right? Where you're moving in one direction and you're kind of going about your routine and then all of a sudden something happens and it's radically different. And often in those moments of transformation, in those moments of course correction or whatever, there's usually some details that happen along the way that remains stuck in your mind. And within the Christian life, we call some of these moments when we're going this way and our life looks like this, and then Jesus and God and the Holy Spirit breaks into our hearts in a new way and we respond to it as conversion moments. And as Catholics we know that, a conversion is not something that happens once and then we're set forever but that every day daily we need to be more deeply converted to the person of Jesus Christ.

But very often the first time we meet him or maybe we met him and we meet him several more times and we were walking with him and then we fall away and then we kind of re meet him again. Those moments of more dramatic conversion are the things that kind of stick in us and though the stories we tell and form what we would call our testimony. That life was like this, and then God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit broke into my life through these... And our life hasn't been the same.

And in the reading today we get one of those stories from Matthew, for Levi; here's the word. This is in Luke. "After this he went out, Jesus and he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office and he said to him, 'Follow me'". So Jesus goes out and he sees this guy, this tax collector, and he looks him in the eye and in a personal way says, "Follow me". Start right there. Have you heard that call from Jesus Christ? Has he looked you in the eye? Has he called you by name and have you heard him say, "Come, follow me"? The whole Christian life, our whole walk of discipleship hinges on this call. Have you encountered the Lord? Have you met him and have you heard him call you by name? And then what is your response?

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Here's Matthew's: "And he left everything, in rose and followed him." Lord let us have the grace to respond in the same way that when we meet you, when we see you, when you hear us calling you for the first time or calling us deeper, let us rise and follow you and leave whatever it is that we need to leave behind. Anything that distracts, anything that deviates, anything that would take us from you Lord Jesus, let us just leave that behind.

"And Levi I made him a great feast in his house and there was a large company of tax collectors and others sitting at a table with him. And the Pharisees and their Scribes murmured against his disciples saying, 'Why do you eat and drink 'with tax collectors and sinners?' And Jesus answered them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, 'but those who are sick, I have come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'" What's really interesting about that answer from Jesus is the fact that all of us, all of them in that room were sinners in need of repentance.

That the difference between the tax collectors and the sinners and the Pharisees and the Scribes was not the fact that they were all sinners, but since all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God. Clearly through our actions, we have separated ourselves from God. The difference between those two groups, the sinners and the tax collectors and the Pharisees and the Scribes was basically self-knowledge. And what I mean by that is, the Pharisees and the Scribes didn't know, didn't believe or didn't kind of operate with the understanding that they needed to be forgiven. They operated under a self-righteousness that in their mind distinguished them from the clear obvious public sinners; the unclean that would be the tax collectors and the sinners.

And the differences, the tax collectors and the sinners knew they were tax collectors and sinners. They knew they were sick. They knew there was a disease. They knew they needed a physician and they saw him in Jesus. What is unbelievably ironic about this is that the whole job of the Pharisees and the Scribes is to understand the law, to communicate the law and to prepare the people of Israel for their Messiah. - To prepare them to be saved through the Messiah, to be healed, to be redeemed. And yet when the Messiah enters into their presence, when the Messiah starts to reveal himself in the signs and wonders that Jesus does. When the Messiah comes to fulfill the law and he checks every box, these Pharisees, Pharisees and the Scribes because of their own.

The judgment that has come upon them through their own self-reliance, self-righteousness and self-preoccupation and a certain worshiping of the form of religion without the power behind it. Because of this, the Pharisees are blinded.

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The ones who are supposed to be righteous and Holy and wise are made fools compared to those who are sinners and unclean. What Jesus is saying here is that He has come for everyone. He has come to call all men to Himself to draw all people to Him. To let His blood wash all, everyone clean who wants it. But at the same time, through freewill and through our own sinfulness, we have the option of separating ourselves from this divine physician and putting ourselves under a certain curse of self-righteousness where we look at others and judge and say, "They need something." But in reality we need something.

And so the model in this story, should of course not be the Pharisees and the Scribes who felt like they could deserve their salvation through, you know, every little minutiae of the law but really they were hypocrites as Jesus goes on to in different parts of the Gospel where He just goes after each of the Pharisees and the all these woe is about being hypocrites, right? And what that means is there's a self-righteousness that they had portrayed but there was no heart transformation. And what you see in the sinners and the tax collectors and what you see in Matthew, is the outside was dirty but when encountering Jesus, an inner transformation begins to take place that eventually transforms the outside as well. Matthew is the model; Levi here is the model of what our response needs to be when we hear that call from the Lord. That Matthew's life, Levi's life is never the same after this moment.

And a couple of things to consider: First is he sees Jesus, he encounters Jesus. You have to meet Jesus. The beginning of conversion is an encounter with Jesus Christ. It's not an intellectual idea. It's not a philosophical norm or principle. It's an encounter. It's a relationship. It's coming to recognize that God is real and He loves us, that Jesus is alive and that He knows us by name. So he encounters Jesus, Jesus extends that invitation to follow Him. Like He does to all of us and his response is perfect. He leaves behind his former life, he rises; it's even the symbolic of getting on his feet, gets out of his chair and goes to Jesus. And then the other response is once he's met the divine physician, once he's met Jesus, he can't wait to share him with all his friends he throws a feast. I mean, just like any of us, when big things happen in our life we want to celebrate with other people. We want to share the joy. I've found the Messiah. I found the one who's going to set me free, the one who knows me, who loves me. All of you who are tax collectors and sinners do, all you unclean. I can't wait to share Him with others. So it's an encounter, it's an invitation, it's a response and then it's a new life.

A new life by marked by a joy in a sharing of the Gospel. For me this moment I had several moments of encounter with Jesus. My first one was when I was eight years old. But the most dramatic kind of conversion moment, the moment where I

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had to like Matthew kind of decide whether I was going to follow the Lord when I was a freshman in high school. So I had known the Lord for many years but I found myself for halfway through my freshman year of high school, kind of live in two different lives.

When I was at school I was just a good athlete, a good student, nice guy but when I was home I was still the disciples still, talked about Jesus still, aware that God was real and He loved me and I was kind of serving two masters. I didn't want my friends at school to know who I really was. And at home, I wasn't really quite ready to show my parents that I no longer was living the way they thought I was living. And you can't live that way, you can't serve two masters. You're either all in or you're all out.

And so it was about halfway through my freshman year, I'm at an all-school mass and went to a Catholic high school, sitting in a pew with all my buddies listening to the homily, not really paying attention. And all of a sudden the priest, Father Loeber stops his homily in the middle of it and says, "Okay, anyone who's ever experienced God, please stand up". And I had experienced Him quite profoundly for several years and I couldn't stand up. I wanted to, I knew I should, the call was right there, and unlike Matthew, I couldn't get on my feet. I was too scared. So Father Loeber makes it a little easier on us. He says, "All right, anyone who's ever seen a mountain or ocean or something beautiful in nature and felt some sort of presence of God," he says, "Stand up". So now more people are standing up and for the second time I couldn't stand up. I was like rooted to the pew. Then Father Loeber makes it even easier on us. He says, "Okay, how many of you have ever had a really good hug or a smile and just made you feel loved and you in any way attributed that to God?" He said, "Stand up". Now the whole choir stands up and people are standing up all over the church and for the third time I couldn't stand up. I wanted to, I knew it was wrong that I wasn't standing. I knew I was denying the Lord, but the weight of living two different lives even though I had encountered Him, even though I had heard His invitation and even though I had said yes to Him before in this moment I was saying no.

Now there was one really important person who was standing and then that was my mom. She came to every all-school mass and she's in the back of the church basically shooting lasers in the back of my head wondering why I'm not standing. And you know my name is Peter so my parents always took great delight in the fact that they named me that, given my mom always joked that she was waiting for a rooster to crawl in the church. Denied him three times you know. So that day, the rest of the day I was miserable because I realized that I had flat out denied the Lord even though I had at one point said yes to Him at that point had said no to Him.

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And you can guess what happened after that, that I changed my mind that I decided I was going to stand up for the Lord that I was always going to respond to His call whenever I had the opportunity. And I haven't been perfect at it by any means. Have been plenty of moments of denial and soon that I'm not proud of. But the point was that and what are the reason I want to tell that story is, wherever you are with the Lord right now, whether you've been walking with him for many years, maybe you've just started the Christian journey, maybe you've never had an encounter with Jesus, I'd invite you to two things.

One, if you have met the Lord before, meditates on that a little bit. Remind yourself about the first love and the joy of when you first met Jesus and how you would have thrown a feast to share Him with others. Spend some time meditating on that. And then the second thing is if you spend a while or you've never met Him, to ask the Lord to be real, to ask the Lord to pass by, to ask the Lord to make eye contact and extend His hand and say come follow me. We're all sinners. We all need a physician. And whether we've responded to Him a long time ago or responded to Him yesterday, every day is an opportunity to be like Matthew, to be looking for the Messiah, to be disposed and ready to respond if and when He reaches out His hand and invites us. And then to have the courage and the power to stand up and say, "I'm going to follow this man." Jesus came not for those who think they're holy, not for those who ultimately through their own self-righteousness work out their salvation in their own ability but for the sinner. Those who are self-aware enough to know that's the Messiah and I want to follow Him. Let us say yes to Jesus today.