

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Overcoming Lies of the Devil

Fr Patrick Gonyeau

Hello friends, Father Patrick Gonyeau here at Corpus Christi Catholic Church, in Detroit, Michigan, on this third Sunday of Lent, in our Pray More Novenas Lenten retreat. If you'd like to hear more from me, you can go to Free Mustard Seeds, the podcast I run, or encounter ministries at www.encounterministries.us. A wonderful ministry equipping tens of thousands of Catholics to walk in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

On this 3rd Sunday of Lent, I'd like to focus with you through the story of the Samaritan woman at the well with Jesus in John chapter 4, on overcoming lies in our lives. You know, the Samaritan woman, she was out at the well drawing water, going for water at noon. And the scripture scholars tell us, like, in that location at that time, she was there trying to avoid people. There was something going on. And later on, after Jesus talks with her about this living water and she gets thirsty for it and says, "Sir give me this water, so I don't have to keep coming here." Jesus puts his finger on the pain in her life and he does it with love. He knows everything, right? He says to her, we hear in John's gospel: ***Go, call your husband and come back.*** ***The woman answered and said to Him, "I do not have a husband."*** She doesn't say anything else, but Jesus knows there's something else. So does the devil. ***Jesus answered her, "You are right in saying, 'I do not have a husband.' For you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true."***

Now, she's had five husbands and she's in a relationship with somebody right now. And Jesus says, "This current person isn't your husband." And this is surely an issue for her, and the people around her, and her relationship with God. And how does Jesus respond to her? How does Jesus respond to you and me when we have sin in our lives, or there's situations that we're struggling and we want to make this right with the Lord. He's ready to engage with us. He's ready to put his finger on the spot. And he is a gentleman, he'll go as far with it, to bring us healing as we'll let him.

Now, the devil on the other hand, Jesus is very clear. He was a liar from the beginning, he seeks only to kill, to destroy. He has no good intentions for anybody, we're made in the image and likeness of God and the devil and fallen angels absolutely hate us. It's a mystery I just can't get my head around, the ultimate rejection of God and the hatred of the devil and have fallen angels. But it is real,

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and Jesus is clear, that the fires of hell are prepared for the devil and his angels. So, we have an enemy and I think about with this Samaritan woman, wooh, I mean the devil has some stuff on her, right? Like, "You have these five - you've had these relationships, you've had this and that and you are really, a piece of work lady." And the Lord though, in his compassion, as He looks her in the eyes and brings up the issue. And she engages in dialogue with him about, "Well where were people worship God?" And Jesus, it's to her that he gives the famous revelation about the hours coming and is now here, when true worshipers will worship in spirit and truth. And indeed God seeks such worshipers.

Now the Samaritan woman would go off and bring the town to Jesus. She's an amazing evangelist, after her encounter with Jesus. And while we don't, you know, know exactly all the details of her story, we can see that, in the way that Jesus engaged with her, that is true. What he said in the house of Zacchaeus, at the end of that incredible scene, where as the keys comes to a beautiful conversion says, "If I've ripped anybody off, I'll pay him back four times over." And Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this household, for the son of man came to seek and to save what was lost." It's what Saint Paul said, "If God is for us, who can be against us."

You know, and we know the devil and the fallen Angels they're against us. And the battleground, the place where they attack us, back on the first Sunday, we talked about temptation. And I didn't say too clearly in that clip, but the battleground on the place where we get attacked, is the mind. Scripture refers to the fiery darts of the enemy and we hold up the shield of faith, to quench those fiery darts. The stuff that's not of God. The thoughts that come at us, that aren't of God.

In the Ignatian tradition, the idea of the discernment of spirits is that, there's three sources for our thoughts. The Holy Spirit gives us wonderful thoughts. The human, we have thoughts, you know, "I'm tired, I need a sandwich, X Y or Z." The thoughts that come from physiological. And then also the devil, and fallen angels. I mean you turn on the TV, it was Mother Teresa who once called the television, Satan's Tabernacle. That doesn't mean there's not some good stuff on there - EWTN - all kinds of good stuff, but when you think about giving a kid, a 13 year old a remote and let him sit there from 10:00 p.m. to 2 a.m. and say, "Watch whatever you want." and it's full cable access. Usually there's plenty of channels that are broadcasting straight out of hell. And so, oh good Lord, help us.

So the thoughts that get thrown at us, ideas that are not from God and they're more than a bad human idea. They're demonic right? So, the evil one loves to throw those thoughts at us and try to give us these little lies, take a little something that is true of our life. Like yes, "I had this sin in my past." The evil one wants to take it,

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just twist it in our side and try to get us to think that the Father doesn't really look at us like perfectly loved and perfectly cherished sons and daughters. I mean that we are chosen and cherished, before the foundations of the world were chosen in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 1:4. So to be able to recognize lies and ask Jesus for the truth. And as Jesus said in John chapter eight, you know: ***If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples and you'll know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*** So His truth to combat the lies.

Now I want to take a minute and look at a couple, kind of general categories of lies. I got a little piece of paper, I'm going to glance on here, some lies and how we overcome them. The first is, that we can't possibly be forgiven of what we've done. Oh! One of my favorite things to do is hear confession. I'd love to go to confession and I also love to hear confession. And I've come across that, certainly, very serious things that, that people have found themselves in. And I just love the tender mercy of God and that sacrament, like, you know, about three years into being a priest I felt the Lord tell me one day in the confessional, "Patrick, your job is to tell them I love them and I forgive them." And so we give advice as best as we can, but if somebody's sincerely repenting, God wants to just wrap them up in His love and let them know like, "You are forgiven." So powerful, and the priest says, "And I absolve you from your sins." That's Jesus speaking through the priest and that powerful word that brings peace to the heart.

So that lie, that we can't possibly be forgiven of what we've done - it's a lie. And Jesus tells us that, you know, the unforgivable sin, right? ***"That whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, will never be forgiven in this age or in the age to come."*** And that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, what it really amounts to - Saint John Paul the second talked about this, that, "It's the definitive rejection of God." It's not, you had too much to drink and you said something stupid, about like you know, it's like, you said something that was awful and you're like, "I think I just blaspheme the Holy Spirit." And you know, angels have perfect intellect, we don't. And so the definitive rejection of God is not capable for you and I, until we've breathed our last. And our decision for or against God is solidified at the end of this life and we stand before the judgment seat of Christ for what the Catholic Church calls the particular judgment.

So, you know, I guess I've heard it said like this, "The only sin you can't be forgiven of is the one you don't confess." And there's truth to that. It's the only the definitive rejection of God, because time is up. You know, when we've left this life and there's - the time is up to repent, when we breathe our last. So that is a lie, that we can't be forgiven of what we've done.

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There's nothing in God's mercy that He can't cover, if we come to Him with a sincere heart and it's contrition that forgives sins. Right? Like, perfect contrition forgives mortal sins and we go to confession when we have serious mortal sin. And confession gives us the grace of perfect contrition. That's not to say, that you might not really have that perfect contrition. If we have mortal sin and we remember that, you know, mortal sin it's got to be serious, its got to be grave matter. You've got to know what's wrong and you've got a freely will it. Those three conditions. And if we do have mortal sin, then you know, the Catholic Church teaches us we need perfect contrition. Perfect contrition to be healed of it and I'm not saying it's not possible to have perfect contrition without the sacrament of confession; but the gift of confession, one of the gifts of it is that it guarantees if you come with imperfect contrition but a sincere heart, it will give you the perfect contrition by the grace of the sacrament.

So, there's that other thing, it's like you know, you have a very, very, serious sin and you think you can't possibly be forgiven of it. But, God can absolutely forgive you of it and even in the confessional, the confession starts by the priest - when we say, "Bless me father I've sinned." and the priest literally blesses you. You start confession blessed. And there's grace to purify, to make perfect your contrition and you're forgiven. So there's nothing in our lives, that God can't forgive. I think we should say that together. "There's nothing in our lives that God can't forgive." Come on, say it with me. "There's nothing in our lives that God can't forgive." His infinite mercy. Praise God.

Now another lie to overcome from the enemy. The lie that we are what we've done. Man, Satan loves to hang that on us, you know. Like you are X Y or Z. And whatever you've done, you're this, you're that. And the Father says, "You're my beloved son, you're my beloved daughter." Our sins do not define us. They can screw us up, absolutely, but they don't define us. The only one who gets the right to truly define us is the one who willed us into being. And God has willed that we would be a beloved son, a beloved daughter. The evil one, he just wants to nibble, whisper that like, "You are - you know - pathetic. "You're never gonna be trustworthy, you're never gonna be chaste, you're never gonna be X, Y or Z." And you know like, "God is so disappointed in you." And like, man, the scriptures say, "Each morning the grace and favor of God is new."

Each morning, you wake up to a smiling Father looking upon you, who's ready to help you walk in holiness that day, and is ready to heal you of yesterday, if there's something that needs healing of. We are not defined by our sins, we are defined by the Father's love. There's a quote coming to mind I'm starting to look it up, but it is John Paul the second again, Saint John Paul the second, that "We are not the sum

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of our failures and sins, but we are the sum of the Father's love for us and our capacity to become the image of the son." Yeah. Scripture says, "***We're being transformed from glory to glory into the image of the son.***" As Christians we're destined, as we follow Jesus with faith, to look like Christ, to walk, talk, speak and act like Christ in every situation. We are not defined by our sins. We might take a shot in the ribs from them, but we go to confession, we get up.

The Lord dust us off, and we remember, venial sins are forgiven with imperfect contrition. They're forgiven through a faithful reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist and with venial sin, you know, I don't I mean to cite the super Holy Roller. I try to go to confession once a week, just because, not anything crazy going on, but because the grace of the sacrament is so powerful. So venial sin, like, the fruit is forgiven through imperfect contrition and going to communion with faith. But I'm looking at the root as well, when I go to confession to God. You know, yeah, "Can you get down in this spot that keeps letting me have moments where I have a slip of the tongue and you know, that word came out that didn't need to come out." So, the root, you know, just the mercy of God available to us in confession. So that lie, that we are, what we've done. Not true.

Now, I want to quote a beautiful priest we have here in the Archdiocese, Detroit. A priest named Fr. Bob Spezia. He would tell guys in the seminary, "When the devil reminds you of your past, remind him of his future." I'm not into talking to the devil or fallen angels, but I do remember an old Jesuit priest who one time, he said he was experiencing some temptation, he just - He just - 92 years old and he just said, "Hey devil, go to hell." You know, so I guess now and again, you know, another one I really like. "Hail Mary, full of grace, punch the devil in the face." So now and again, and to just you know, if he gets in the way, you pull the trigger. That sort of thing.

So when he tries to hang something on you from the past, you're not defined by your past. Like, all that matters about my identity, is how the Father sees me. As his beloved son and or his beloved daughter. Jesus has purchased that for us. John chapter one verse 12: "***To those who believed in him, he gave the power to become children of God.***" Our faith in Christ, the gift of our baptism, growing into our faith. Our identity in Christ is we are beloved sons and beloved daughters of God and no sin can change that. Even if, you know, and yeah, God forbid. Even somebody who's going to go to hell - God, you know, God still loves them. It's Saint John Paul the second again, he - God doesn't send people to hell. But - Saint John Paul the second said, "But He honors our free will." Thank God everybody on this retreat, nobody's choosing that. Amen.

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Another lie. A lie that we can't move on from the past. It's tied up with that, you know, that we're identified our lie. Our sins can, you know, define us. Which isn't true. And the lie that we can't move on from our past. You know, Tim Tebow, I really loved when Tebow fever was hitting the world. I thought that was awesome. You know the guy, the one playoff game he throws for 316 yards, down 316. His average per pass completed was 31.6 yards. I mean, like, I think Jesus was maybe secretly playing wide receiver that day for the Steelers. It's awesome. And Tim Tebow had this beautiful quote he said, "I don't know what my future holds, but I know who holds my future." God has beautiful plans for your life and my life and he loves to redeem our past.

One of my favorite scholars, just an amazing daughter of God, Dr. Mary Healy. Check her books out and lectures. Wow! Like YouTube Dr. Mary Healy. I once asked her in person and said, "What do you do when you blow it?" You know, 'cause I'm pretty sure she's like a walking saint and then just like, "What do you do when you blow it?" And she said - and I meant like when you're speaking or if you have an uncharitable moment and she said, "Well I ask God to redeem it." That's brilliant. So I picked up this prayer from her I'd say, "Lord redeem my actions, redeem my words." If I had a moment, "Please redeem it." And when I confess, you know, we confess our sins, it's good to ask God, "God redeem that situation. Please heal any division I caused."

The thing about feeling if we can't move on from our past, it's like we've caused damage which can't be fixed. But the Catechism of the Catholic Church says clearly, that every moment of time, past, present, and future, is before God who is outside of time. So God can redeem our past and the lie that we can't move on from our past is, I think, destroyed when we think about the grandeur of God who's outside of time. And God holds our past and says, "Son, trust me with your past. And if you've confessed this sin, oh my gosh, don't bring it up again. It's confessed I forgave it. The past is covered in my mercy."

And so, the perception of the past that we have when we make a confession you make a life confession or you know, you've confessed your sins up to, you know, only just regularly confessing your sins up to this point in your life. Our past is covered in His mercy. Our past is covered in the grace of His blood shed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. So we don't want to look at our past apart from His mercy. So the thing about we can't move on from the past is just a lie. It's a lie from the evil one and it's not true. The Lord Jesus holds our past and He holds our future. That's good news.

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I like to think that the Samaritan woman was experiencing and her encounter with Jesus. I mean, she went and brought the whole town to Jesus. This transformation in her, just in the love in His eyes, the words He spoke to her, that there was a way out for her. That she didn't have to be defined as the woman who have five husbands and was trying to have a sixth. And had to get water at the well in the middle of the day and she'd never changed and she'd never move on. Now she's probably known as well, you know, we know her it's like, "She's the lady that got that whole town saved, that let them come and know Jesus." That's pretty awesome.

Now just a little bit more, a little piece of inner healing here. I just want to make this note that, when you're aware of anxiety, about your past or present, simply talk to Jesus. If you're aware of sin, confess it. And yet also ask Jesus, "Are there any lies I'm believing Lord, about myself in this situation?" This is so powerful. One of my favorite examinations of conscience is, to ask the Lord Jesus, "Are there any lies I'm believing about myself Lord?" And just listen, catechism number 1776 tells us, "*Our conscience is a sanctuary.*" We are alone with God. We're made to hear the voice of the Lord in our conscience, in our thoughts. "Are there any lies I'm believing about myself Lord?" Write it down or take note of it and then ask Him, "Jesus, you're the way, the truth and the life. What truth do you want to replace these lies with?" And then, you just simply say, "In the name of Jesus I renounce." And you renounce the lies, "And in the name of Jesus, I declare the truth." And who the Son sets free is free indeed. And the truth sets you free.

And so the Spirit is the Lord, second Corinthians chapter three tells us: "***The Spirit is the Lord, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.***" And so if you don't feel free, if you feel anxious about your past, if you feel that there's, you know, that there's sins that are defining you presently and hopeless and whatnot. Okay first, if it's confessed, man. That thing, the evil one has no legal claim on it anymore. He can't poke you with that anymore, Jesus forgave it. Take some time and ask Jesus, who holds your past, your present, and your future. "Jesus, are there any lies I'm believing about myself?" Write them down, take note of them, ask Jesus for the truth, then renounce, "In Jesus name I renounce the lies and in Jesus name I declare the truth."

And brothers and sisters, just as we want to keep overcoming temptation in our life, we want to keep overcoming the lies. Jesus died on the cross to purchase not only eternal life for us in heaven, but intimate freedom and love for us. Even now as we share each heartbeat with Him. So we don't want to leave any room in our heart or our mind, for the devil, the father of lies, to give us lies. To give us things that aren't of the mind of Christ and I think a simple examination of conscience,

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asking the Lord, "What lies am I believing?" And then, what truths he wants to replace those with, is a great way to live free. Like the Samaritan woman, I pray that all of us bring our town, the areas we have influence, to Jesus. God bless you, friends.