

Praying Through Lectio Divina

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Hi, my name is father Steven Borello and it's a joy to join you and to lead you in this online Pray More Healing Retreat. The arc of our retreat will be encountering fear and suffering with the Lord and finding freedom and healing in His love for us. Let us begin now in prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Good and gracious Father, in our lives, we experience so many woundings, so much suffering and we cannot make sense of any of it without You. So, we entrust to You this time. We entrust to You our hearts and our minds. We entrust to You our entire stories. We ask you, Mother Mary, that, through your intercession, you would bring to your son, our lives that He would send to you those healing graces, we most need. St. Joseph, fight for us and protect us.

So, we pray, Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Review A bit About Prayer

Well, it really is a joy to be with you. As I said, my name is father Steven Borello, and I've been ordained now just a little over a decade and it truly has been a most incredible journey with the Lord. One of my greatest experiences as a priest was to serve at the college seminary at St. John Vianney in St. Paul, Minnesota for three years. It was there that I walked with our seminarians from the Diocese of Joliet and many other men in their own life of prayer and growth and relationship with God.

When it comes to any retreat, it's always important that we begin just to review a little bit about prayer. And so today we're going to focus on prayer itself and then the subsequent videos, we'll look at fear, suffering, and what do we do when we experience dryness or difficulties in our lives of prayer?

So, let's begin with this question and this idea of prayer. The very first thing is, is that it's all about God's work and the best place we turn to hear this is Isaiah 43:1. Right, where the Lord is speaking to the prophet Isaiah. And He says, well, let's just read it. Because that's always better than me trying to paraphrase the word of God. ***"But now thus says the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel, fear not for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine."***

And this is so important, right? Because the whole work of prayer is God's work in our lives. It's not something that we have to make happen. It's not something where we go to that place in which we're going to pray and it requires all of our effort to make something happen. No. No,

prayer is really all about the Lord and giving the Lord permission and space to work in our hearts and our minds.

A Desire to Be in Relationship With You

And so, the very first thing that we want to just remember is that God created us, right? So, He already knows. We're created with intention. We're created with purpose, and He formed us. And that means that He takes our experiences, and He uses our experiences, as Paul tells us in Romans, right? *"For those who believe in God, "all things work for the good."*

So, He wants to use every experience for our good. And Isaiah goes on to say, *"He redeemed us."* And this is so beautiful because the Lord desires our participation in His work of salvation, of His work of sanctification. He desires our participation in our own healing. He wants to be in this relationship with us. He created us for relationship, right? He walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. And even after Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord is still looking for them because He desires us to be in relationship with Him.

Now, what I find so amazing about God, and this one verse from Isaiah, right? Is that not only does He redeem us, but He calls us by name, and He says, you are mine. And what does that mean for me? It means that the Lord Himself knows me. And He has placed Himself in relationship with me. He has called me by name. He calls me Steven. And in that there is a dialogue that the Lord desires to have with me, that He desires to have with you, because he has called us by name. And even better, right? He says, you are mine, which means the father in heaven, the son, and the spirit have taken responsibility for our lives. They themselves have taken responsibility for us and for our wellbeing.

So, when it comes to prayer, it means that God Himself has already placed Himself in relationship with us. He's already waiting to meet us. He's already waiting to encounter us as we bring to him our hearts and our minds and our lives. As we bring to him, everything. And this is really good news because it means that you and I don't have to make something happen in prayer. It's all about being in relationship with Him.

So, to enter into that relationship, there's a couple of things we need to do ahead of time, right? The first is we want to have a space that is conducive for prayer, right? One in which we will not be easily disturbed. And we will have the time to reflect on what's happening within us as we read sacred scripture and as we take time to pray. Secondly, we always want to remember that since the Lord is the one who makes that first movement, right, He's already in relationship with us. We're being asked to ask for the grace to be aware of His presence, to be aware of the fact that He is present right now to you and to me.

And so, it's always important that, as we're beginning our time of prayer, we begin always in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. And we ask for the grace to be aware of the father's presence, be aware of the Holy Trinity's presence in this time and this space, so that they can be the ones leading and guiding us through our time of prayer. And lastly, I always like to take a moment and pause at this place and just say, Lord, how do you see me right now? How do you perceive me or in this moment, right? And sometimes I don't hear anything. But

oftentimes there is just a gentleness, a gentle reminder of Steven, I love you. Steven, you are mine. And this is so important because it sets everything up, right? For relationship. It sets everything up for intimacy with God.

The Oldest Form of Prayer in the Church

The kind of prayer I want to invite us to, to enter into in this intimacy is called Lectio Divina. It is one of the, if not the oldest, form of prayer in the church, right? The Benedictine monks really practiced this every single day. And this is really their work, their aura. Their work is this life of prayer. This sacred reading of scripture.

Now, Lectio Divina is divided up into four stages. It's very systematic in some ways. The first is Lectio, which is the reading of the text. The second is Meditatio, which is meditating on the word or phrases that stood out to us. The third is Oratio, which is praying, sharing with the Lord what arose within the heart as we were meditating. And lastly is Contemplatio or this gaze upon God, this reflection, this sitting in the Lord's presence and just simply being with Him. And we're going to go into each one of these, just a little bit more in detail. And then just to walk through a simple passage of scripture.

Lectio

So Lectio, the reading of scripture. Whenever I enter into a period of prayer, and I've already recognized that the Lord has brought me here and that I am in His presence and I've asked for that gift of awareness. I take whatever text it is I'm praying with that day. And sometimes it's the same text over subsequent days because there's a lot of meat in it. And I begin by slowly reading the text out loud. I do this twice, right? The first time is just to hear the text so that it's in the mind. And the second time I read it out loud slowly so I engage all of my senses, right? I engage my hearing. I engage my seeing. I engage this gift of speaking. Even in some ways, the sense of touch in the way that I am just enunciating the words as I read them. And as I read it, the first time through I'm reading it slowly to hear the word of God, to be soaked in it. And then I read it through a second time. And the second time, it's important. I always have a pencil with me. Now this is a pen, but whenever I'm praying, I have a pencil with me.

So, as I'm reading it through the second time, I'll underline, I'll highlight, I'll circle words or phrases that stand out to me. And by stand out to me, what I mean by that is that in some way, I notice that my heart has moved, right? I might read a word or a phrase, and it brings tears to my eyes. I might read something and say, well, that's not true. I don't believe that. And so, it's important that in this place where we're sitting, this place where we're taking our time to pray, that we have the space to notice what is going on internally as we read these words. And this is crucial because the Lord wants to speak to us through His word. He wants to speak to us through what He has written. And so, as we're listening attentively, both the first and the second time, and the second time we're underlining and highlighting those words or phrases, we just give God and ask the Lord to help us notice those things that are moving within us. And we want to highlight things that bring us joy and console us. We want to highlight things that disturb us or make us frustrated or angry, or even in some ways, push against God. And we want to highlight

those phrases in which we almost feel numb. Like, ugh, like, I don't even know what this means, or there's confusion around.

Meditatio

So, after we've read the passage twice and notice these words or phrases, we move on to the next stage of Lectio, which is the Meditatio. The part of meditating on the words or phrases that have stood out to us. So, I always begin with the first word or phrase, right? And so just taking the example of Isaiah 43, right? So, "But now thus says the Lord, ***"he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine."***

So, as I was reading this, right, this passage, there's so many words. Almost all the words stand out to me. But as I was reading it to you, the particular one that stood out to me today was, ***"I have called you by name."*** And so, what I would do is I would take that phrase. ***"I have called you by name."*** I would ask the Lord, what's what's happening in my heart? What am I noticing as I reflect on this idea and this truth that you have called me by name? And as I'm sitting there with the Lord, I might notice, well, that there's an intimacy, there's a closeness, that he knows me. That He uses my nickname, right? Maybe not my full name. And so there's almost a sense of friendliness there, a playfulness. Maybe I hear it and what comes up in my heart is this real resistance. It's like, well, I don't believe it. I don't believe that You know my name. I don't believe that You see me, that You hear me. And these are all really important, because as we're reflecting, as we're meditating on this word or phrase, all of a sudden, all of these things can bubble up in our hearts and in our minds. And the Lord then wants what's bubbling up as we're meditating on this, right? Why did I react this way, Lord? Like what makes me so upset? What's going on here as I'm sitting with this word or this phrase? These are the things that we bring to God in prayer.

So, then what would happen is, is as I'm sitting there, as I'm reflecting on this phrase, ***"I have called you by name."*** Right, as I sit here and as I reflect on this phrase, what I'm noticing in my heart is both just a joy in the sense that I am known and a sorrow, right? There's a sorrow in my heart for the times when I haven't really believed that I am in relationship with God, that the father has known me through and through.

Oratio

And as I've sat here and as I've meditated on this phrase, I now move to Oratio. I move to prayer and I say, Jesus, like, thank you so much that the father has called me by name. Jesus, thank you for allowing me to experience and be reminded of His love for me and His intimacy with me. Thank you, Jesus, for His kindness and his compassion and his tenderness, right? But then I turn to the Lord and I say, Jesus, like, there's a deep sorrow in my heart. A deep sorrow in my heart because there are times when I haven't believed this, where I haven't believed my identity, or I haven't believed that the father was close to me.

And what's so powerful about this is, as I'm praying, right, it gives the Lord permission to respond. It gives Jesus permission to speak to my heart. It gives Jesus permission and almost a

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sense of him inviting me, almost like saying, you know, like, can you give me the sorrow? Right, because my father has forgiven you in the sacraments. My father has forgiven you in His mercy. Can you hand over to me that sorrow that you're carrying?

And it creates dialogue. There's now space for dialogue with God in this time of prayer. It's all rooted in scripture. Because it's important that it's rooted in scripture because sometimes the enemy, just like he does with Adam and Eve, he wants to sow seeds of doubt, seeds of lies, right? He wants to sow these things, these untruths. And so, as I'm sitting here with Jesus, as I'm sharing with Jesus, the sense of just like wonder and awe that father knows me, that He calls me by name, that there's this intimacy that He has with me. And there's this desire for intimacy that I have with the father, but also the shame of my sin, this struggle that's in my heart. And as I share that with Jesus, there's almost a sense of him approaching and saying, and just inviting me to let go. And to be honest with the Lord, Lord, I don't know how to let go, because I struggle with control. I struggle with holding onto things, with being my own master in some ways, right? And, as I share that with Jesus, there is just this gentleness and this compassion and this sense of, well, let us go slow.

Contemplatio

And after we finished praying and sort of like the time has run its course, right? I still find myself in God's presence. And it moves to this place of Contemplatio, of simply being with the Lord, of heart speaking to heart. That whether or not I'm saying anything to God, the Lord is still speaking to my heart in this time of contemplation. This time of sacred resting with the Lord. Or, as St. John Vianney would say, *"it is as one face gazing into the face of another."* And in this place of contemplation, there is a deep rest that takes place in the soul, that allows the Lord to work and to move in such powerful, powerful ways.

Take out Your Journal

So, at the end of the time of prayer, though, right, after this contemplation, after our time has finished, what we want to do is we want to take time now to journal. And what I would journal is I would begin by just saying, right, this is the phrase that I meditated on. And maybe during your time of prayer, you were able to go through one or two or three phrases. But let's say it was just the one.

So, you would say, I meditated on this phrase and here's what came up as I meditated on this phrase. It was the Lord showing me or this movement in my heart that there was such a joy in being known by God. And at the same time, there was this sorrow. And how Jesus met me in the sorrow of my sin, and simply invited a handing over to him of that love, handing over to him of my own shame. And in that place of handing over, there was this deep and profound intimacy.

And what I want to record is the fact that, in this place, in this phrase, I encountered the Lord in this way and how that touched my heart, how that moved me. And so this is Lectio. And it's so powerful because the Lord will bring up from within us so many different things. I remember one time praying with a very different passage of scripture and the Lord called out my unbelief as I was reading this passage. I was like, oh my gosh, Lord, I had no idea that I doubted you so

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much here. So, it's very powerful. It's very powerful. And now I want to give you a little homework because I think it's really important to practice this. And you know, what, if you find yourself spending most of your time in the Meditatio, please make sure that you move into that place of prayer, right? And the shift from meditation to prayer is, it's no longer me reflecting on the words and the meaning of the words of scripture, but now it's me sharing with the Lord what I've noticed and allowing the Lord to speak back and allowing the Lord to respond and to enter into these places.

Preparation and Reflection

So, what I'd like to do is to give you just a little homework in preparation for our conversation on fear and our time of reflection and prayer around fear. And so that homework, I'm asking is that you would join me in just practicing these four steps of Lectio as we reflect on the passage of Peter walking on the water. Now, this is Matthew 14:22-33. And I guarantee you that all of us are going to experience something unique to each one of us.

So, I want to encourage you to take the time over the course of this next week to sit with Jesus for at least 20 minutes, but most likely 30. Just to sit with Him and allow the Lord to bring up what words or phrases stand out to you as you're reading it, to reflect on each one individually, and to take at least as much time as necessary, right? If I'm going to put a minimum on it, I would say we shouldn't be able to make it through a word or phrase and under 15 minutes, right? So, if you have a passage and there's like 10 of them, well, that's a long time of prayer. And what a gift that God gives us to be able to stay in His word and to stay so, so deeply in a singular passage as He unfolds it. And it's almost like a flower that blooms for us.

And so, again, it's praying with Matthew 14:22-33 of Peter being in the boat and then Peter walking on water with Jesus. To prepare our hearts for looking at the fears and our own lives and how we are called to respond to them. And with that, let me just give you a blessing.

Closing Prayer

The Lord be with you. Good and gracious father, we ask upon Your sons and daughters an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that You would bless them in this time, grant them the gift of perseverance and prayer. But most of all, Father, we ask that You would fill them with knowledge of Your love for them. And may every grace and every blessing descend upon Your sons and daughters, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Well, my brothers and sisters, I hope that you have a most wonderful of weeks and be assured of my prayers for you. God bless.