

## **Healing and Memory in Light of Divine Providence**

### **Dr. Mario Sacasa**

Hello and welcome everybody to the Pray More Healing Retreat. My name is Dr. Mario Sacasa and I'm a licensed marriage and family therapist. And I look forward to journeying with you over the course of this retreat experience. I know you're going to have many dynamic speakers and presenters, and I'm grateful to have been invited to just be one of the many who will be presenting to you. And I pray that whatever I offer and whatever the other speakers offer is an opportunity for you to be able to grow deeper in your understanding of yourself, being able to grow and assimilate more of the experiences of your past and being able to better understand your emotional life and where things might be going off, knowing how to grow in greater virtue and also how to grow in greater hope and faith and surrender to the Lord, despite what challenges you may be experiencing.

And so, I just want to start by saying that we're all in this journey together. Even me is with the doctorate and fancy credentials and all this stuff. We're all trying to figure out life together. We're all trying to fumble along and try to understand what it is that the Lord is asking of us and trying to be faithful to that call. And so, I pray that whatever I offer to you may be a blessing and a benefit for you.

So, in the four presentations that I'm going to be offering, I'm going to be speaking about some topics that are near and dear to my heart. I'm going to be talking about memory, what the role of memory is in our psychological and spiritual life, what the role of hope is in our life and how can we grow in understanding what hope is. But again, from a psychological perspective, as well as a theological perspective, and then my last presentation is going to be focusing on healing. And what does that mean to actually heal from my memories and heal from experiences in our life and be able to grow forward and to move forward, to be in greater freedom, but to be also in greater connection and understanding and awareness of what our limitations are and how God is calling us to be, so let's get into this then.

### **The Role of Memory**

So, the today's presentation, we're going to be speaking about what the role of memory is. And again, in our spiritual life, why God gives us this great gift and what we can do to, to grow and increase our capacities here with regards to our memories.

Okay. So, what's the point of memory to begin with? Let's just kind of start there. Let's kind of talk about this. All right. So, what does memory do, think about just how memory helps shape, who we are, the ability to recall our lived experiences and the ability to remember key moments in our life. That's part of who we are as people, we have capacities to be able to draw upon, to think about our memories and our experiences.

So, I'll just give a quick example of this here. Recently, we were doing some kind of, I wouldn't say remodeling might be too strong of a word with regards to what we're doing around the house, but we were just changing some pictures from time to time. It's always nice. You know, the family grows, and you have these pictures lying around that you look at and you're like, yeah, you know, it might be time to update that, the kids are getting a little bit bigger.

And so, something that my mom used to do and something that I do is that whenever I'm changing an eight by 10 picture or, or five by seven picture of the boys of my kids, what I do is I keep the old one behind it. And so, whenever I'm updating the new one, I keep the old one behind it. And the reason that I do that is so that when I go to update the new one, I have an opportunity to look at the old pictures and just kind of gently remind myself about my sons. And I only have boys and looking at them and seeing how much they have grown and how much they've just matured as people.

And so, when I look at these pictures, what the pictures do is it's stirring my memory, because I can remember when I took those pictures. I can remember my kids when they were two, when they were babies, when they were four, when they were five, when they were six, when they were seven, when they were eight. And just looking at those pictures, allowing that to be an opportunity for me to reconnect with who I was at that age, who I was not only when I was a child at that age, but who I was as a father, when my kids were two years old, three years old, whatever the case may be, that experience of being able to go back into our memory and to relive certain experiences is a great gift. It's a great gift when we use it again appropriately, it's good to be reminded of the progress. It's good to be reminded of the journey. It's good to be reminded of where the Lord has led us. And it's good to be reminded that we're still on a journey and we're moving forward with it.

So, I can do that with, you know, when it comes to looking at pictures, but think about it on your own life. Think about just different key memories or key moments in your life. Think about the time that you learned how to ride a bike, what emotions got stirred up. When you think about that experience, think about high school and maybe there was some particular difficult times in high school. What did that feel like? Or going away to college for the first time? What was that experience like for you? It's good to be able to recall all of our memories and being able to, to think about and to pray and to experience and to, and to give the Lord the gift of our life because our life is a gift. And the way that we remember our lives is certainly through our memory.

## **Our Long Term Memory**

So psychologically speaking, why is it that we, where is memory and how does memory work? Well, memory psychologically speaking is kind of a multifaceted, you know, entity and, and it hits different parts of our brain and different parts of our brain are kind of be pulled activities, being pulled together to kind of bring back a certain memory. But our long-term memory specifically is, is stored in part of the brain called the hippocampus.

And so, Dan Siegel does this kind of rudimentary understanding of what our brain looks like. And if my hand right here, if you look at this for a second, and this is kind of the brain stem kind of coming down, and then he says, if you put your thumb kind of in the middle, like this, and

then wrap around right here, this would be, if this is kind of a shape of a brain, if my camera's kind of picking this up, right, this would be the prefrontal cortex right here, here, we got the brain stem and then where my thumb is kind of deep in here, this is what's called the limbic system. This is kind of a deeper part, emotional. This is a deeper part of our brain, the brain stem we share with lizards, the limbic system, this aspect here we share with mammals. And then here, right here, this prefrontal cortex and this nice, beautiful coat that we have, our cerebral cortex is what makes us uniquely human. At least biologically speaking. Obviously we have eternal souls as well. So, I'm not being a materialist, but as far as our brains are concerned, this is one of, this is the key difference that we see between us.

But right in here, this kind of limbic system, this is what governs emotion. And this is where also our long term memory is. And it's interesting, and that's an important concept because we have to know that our memories are tied to our emotions and our emotions can certainly impact our memories as well. So fun fact here, women typically have larger hippocampuses, which is again, kind of a structure here within this limbic system.

Women typically have larger hippocampuses than men, which is why wives can remember every single detail about an argument, you know, and bring it up to you when you're not aware of it. So, but guys, this is why guys tend to forget, you know, what they eat for lunch yesterday also. So again, generally speaking, we know that this is always the case, but generally speaking, this is one of the places where we see differences. And so also when it comes to men and female differences, because women have larger hippocampuses, larger capacities for emotional processing, larger capacities for memory recall, you know, this is part of again, the gift in difference between what men and women are. Don't have time to give a full lecture on that. That would be for another experience some time.

## **What Influences Our Memory**

But what we do know is that because our memories are tied to our emotional space, we know that our current state, our subjective experience is something that can certainly influence our memories. We don't actually remember things exactly like they happen. Our recall is shaped by our subjectivity. It's the imaginative faculties of our brain are being activated when we're calling together when we're recalling a memory, this of course has been proven when we think about September 11th. And now that, you know, traumatic event that happened over 20 years ago in our country, we have studies that show that you can talk to people and say, you know, we can recall certain aspects of remember where you were. And that's always the question people say, remember where you were when this thing happened.

And people will remember certain aspects of it, but they may fill in the gaps because we don't actually remember things kind of like, like a movie we fill in the gaps with, with other details that may be coming from other memories or from our current experience or whatever the case may be. This is important because our memory is influenced again, as I'm saying by our subjectivity, by our current state. And of course, by our own imagination, there's nothing wrong with this. And why is this important? Psychologically speaking? Well, a key psychologist, one of the early psychologist theorists, his name was Alfred Adler and Adler would say that when he was working with his clients or his patients, he would often ask them to recall their earliest

emotional state. What was, excuse me, often ask them to recall their earliest memory. And this technique that therapist often used is you ask somebody to recall their earliest memory. And it's an important technique because what it does is it reveals something about where the person is today.

So, if the memory that was recalled was a negative memory, then it might give some indication that there's something difficult that the person is currently going through. If you know, the memory was certainly happy, then, then there might be some kind of state that they're doing okay. You know, right now. But over the course of treatment, what he would say is that you would see that people's earliest memories would change, or at least their interpretation of those memories would change. And if therapy was successful then what you would see would be happier earlier, memories would be emerging. And this is again, is because our memories are certainly attached to our subjectivity.

That doesn't mean that we can't, you know, that memories doesn't matter. Of course, it absolutely matters. But what I'm saying is the reason that it matters is because the way that we remember things is important, what we remember, what we hold onto, we can't, our brains don't have that much storage. So, to speak, as I've gotten older, I've realized that there's less and less storage up there. The terabytes are running low. You know, things have to be dumped and there's no more backup, hard drives anymore, you know, but what I'm saying is that when the things that, that you do remember, you remembered them a certain way for a certain reason.

So, thinking again about my own life, there have certainly been times where I've recalled experiences of my childhood. And I've been, you know, like I remember it this way, this way, this way. And then I share that with my siblings and my siblings said, no, man, you got that wrong. And that's not the way it happened. What happened was X, Y and Z. Well, were we both in two different places? No, of course, but just over the course of our lives, the things that we've held onto have been different, the interpretations of those experiences have been different, but still something did happen. And still, it's important for us to be able to remember, you know.

## **Why Does Memory Exist?**

So, it's kind of tricky, I guess, is kind, what I'm getting at is that psychologically speaking memory is a rather complex entity. So why is it exist then if, if it's faulty or if we can't exactly remember everything with great accuracy, or if it's subjected to our imagination and our subjective experience, why does memory exist? Psychologically speaking? The reason is because memory exists to teach us memory exists to be an instructor in our life. As I said earlier, we remember things a certain way. Why do we remember those things? Ask yourself that question. That's an important question to ask, because there's something in the way that we are remembering it, there's something in that experience itself. And the way that we have come to process that experience in our life that is teaching us something about ourselves.

We learn, we learn from our memory. We learn from the successes, but often, you know, the hardships of life end up being life's greatest teachers and life's greatest instructors. And so, we learn from the things that have happened to us and our body and our brain is trying to be efficient

and trying to be able to process and to understand what it is that we've experienced. So, we can be better moving forward.

See, the reason that we remember things isn't just to get stuck in those memories, or just to kind of go digging and reliving them and getting stuck in a sense of nostalgia, not at all. We remember things a certain way so that it helps us to shape us so that we can learn from the experiences and so that we can be better prepared to move forward, whether that is to be able to recreate the successes of our past or whether that is to, to be able to avoid future hardships again, to whatever degree that we possibly can. It's spending time within our memory. That gives us the ability to be able to learn from our experience from our past, so that we can be able to grow and to move forward in life. This is what memory is. Memory is an absolute gift. As I've been saying, it is a teacher, it is a prophet. It's what helps us to be able to, to look to the past and to be able to say, okay, like, what are things going to look like moving forward?

## **Memory for Hope**

See, John of the Cross would say that if you want to work on hope, you have to work on your memory. What a curious statement that is. If you want to work on hope, then you need to work on your memory. Think about that, in moments in your life, when you've been struggling with anxiety or been struggling with depression, what tends to happen is that that negativity overrides us. And what happens is that we end up thinking about the past and thinking about all the experiences of life, and we can fall into a certain despondent or a certain fear where then we misinterpret everything. And we say everything has happened only in a negative way. This has only been, you know, one hardship after another one bad thing after another. And that unfortunately is our memory and our recall of a memory being influenced by our current subjective experience.

If we're currently struggling with a sense of anxiety or a sense of depression, but if we're able to, to just take a minute to then pray and to invite the Lord and to re-experience some of the successes that we've had in life. And if we're honest with ourselves, anybody who's gotten this far in life, it's not all been bad. There's certainly been good things as well. And so, to being able to draw up those good things, you can also look back on your memories and be able to say, well, no, look at what happened. Look at the way that I overcame that, look at the way that hidden blessing materialized look at the way that that surprise manifested itself. Look at the way that I was able to overcome that particular challenge.

You want to draw that up as well. This is what John of the Cross is saying is that if we work on our memory and we're able to hold the tension of both the good and the bad that we can see the hardship for what it was, but also the success for what it was then in living in the tension of both or in the mix and mingling of both, then we will be able to look forward to the future with a certain degree of hope only, then we'll be able to look to the future to say, regardless of the challenge that I'm experiencing right now, I know there's still something good. That's going to come on the other side of it as well. So that is the beginning of hope.

## **Inside Out**

Last point here that I want to make, as we're kind of talking about memory from a psychological and kind of spiritual perspective is we're to really hammer this point home, think of the movie Inside Out. I love movies. I'm always talking about movies. I think it's one of Disney, Pixar's greatest gems. And that if you haven't seen the movie, the movie is about, you know, you're going inside the head at an 11 year old girl and the different emotions and how the different emotions play out and interact with one another to shape this girl's behaviors. One of the key aspects of the movie is these core memories and that there are memories in our life that certainly shape our personality. It's absolutely brilliant because, like I said earlier, the way that we remember things, what we remember is certainly indicative of our personality and who we are.

And so, these key experiences are crucial. What we see with this 11 year old as the movie is progressing not to give too many spoilers here is that she's growing in her ability to, to revisit her memories or to experience her memories in a more complex and nuanced way. But they aren't just all joyful or they aren't, aren't just all happy or they aren't just all fearful, or they aren't just all sad or disgust, or anger that memories now have a certain complexity to them and a nuance to them. That's a beautiful way, visually of trying to, to experience or try to communicate what I'm trying to say with us, what I'm trying to say to you right now. I'm sorry, I'm fumbling over my words. I'm so excited about this stuff. All right.

## **Remembering God in Every Way**

But this is my hope for you. And this is what I'm trying to communicate is for you to recognize that our life is an act of remembrance. And this of course is what ties us to our faith. When we look at the old Testament and the ways that the Lord led the Israelites out of the desert or the great patriarchs and the great kingdom, why did the Jews have all these great festivals? Why do they have these altars? Why do they have these ceremonial, these moments where they recall these things, because what they're doing is not just recalling the way that God saved them, but through these experiences and recalling these experiences. And remember these experiences, they're trying not to forget who God is. See, that's the problem is that the hardships of life can distort us. And we can forget who the Lord is and what He has done in our life.

This is why the Israelites were so keen on making sure that there were altars made and that there were like at Jacob's Well these are touch points. These are physical manifestations of, of the ways that God manifested Himself physical manifestations of the ways that God has revealed Himself in the lives of His people.

And of course, as Catholics, we take this a step further we're in the Mass, the Mass is the great act of remembrance where we're able to then not just remember in our facts but step into God's memory, where we reexperience the passion of Jesus Christ, where we reexperience the love of the, of the son being poured out to us, the love of the father being poured out to the son and the son reciprocating that and opening it up to us.

## **Bring the Lord into Our Memories**

Okay. So you can see, as we're talking about our memory, certainly psychologically speaking is something that teaches us. We go back, we revisit our memories, we re-experienced them. And it's good to go back and to remember certain aspects of our life and to pray with the good and with the bad, not allowing the bad to wallow us up. If you have certain traumatic experiences, then certainly going back to them is going to be difficult. And there's all sorts of protective barriers that our body does to prevent us from. Certainly, re-experiencing certain traumas.

If that is you, then my sincere encouragement is to, to go to find a therapist, to work through those traumatic memories. That's something that's beyond what I believe this retreat series, or certainly what my lectures will be able to offer. That I believe you need certain guidance with a trusted other person, to be able to walk into those memories with somebody who knows what they're doing, and somebody who can take care of you and guide you through those experiences.

But outside of trauma, we all have, again, a mix of the good and the bad. And if we're listening to them and we're paying attention to them, then they're going to move us forward and what they were going to reveal to us, isn't just who we are and how we've grown. But if we bring the Lord and His grace into this, like the Israelites, we can then see and have certain touch points and certain, certain key memories, key moments where we can see that God manifested himself in my life. God revealed himself in a particular way, in that moment in my life. And if we hold onto that, then we can see that that's going to lead us forward into great hope.

And again, as I just stated, to be able to then do that in the context of the Mass, where we are, re-experiencing reliving this love, because of course what we know with the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ is that this is what the, the second person that Trinity is doing the whole time is receiving the love of the father and pouring it out to us now.

So again, not to get off too much in a tangent right there, but I want to encourage you my dear friends, brothers, and sisters, those of you who are paying attention to this presentation, I want to pray for you. And I pray that you're able to look at your memories as a gift, even if you've gone through particular hardships in your life, to be able to invite the Lord into those spaces, to be able to rejoice and to be stewards of the journey that God has put you on so that you can see and be able to trust Him more so that you can move forward into the future with great hope, great hope that regardless of what happens, that God is going to lead you.

So that is the end of this first presentation. I hope that it's made sense to you, and I hope that it's blessed you in some way. The next talk, I'm going to dive in a little bit deeper into this concept of hope and how is it that we understand hope again, psychologically speaking. And then the third presentation, we're going to talk and understand what does hope look like theologically speaking, and then the fourth presentation. Again, we're going to talk about what healing looks like and how we can bring all of this together with regards to our memory, with regards to hope and with regards to being able to, to come to, to assimilate and to accept all aspects of our life.

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So, thank you so much for joining me. I pray that you're doing well. God bless you on your journey of faith. God bless you on your own personal journey of healing. God certainly leads us and guides us every step of the way. God is relentless and wanting to shape us. God is relentless in wanting us to become the best versions of ourselves. And so, if our suffering teaches that, moves us along, sometimes God uses suffering to teach us, to shape us. And I pray that if you are in a, in a season right now where you're struggling, continue to have hope and to pray. And again, just thank you for joining us. And we look forward to seeing you in the next lesson. God Bless.