

Embracing the Power of Hope

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Welcome back, welcome back. Welcome back, everybody. Thanks so much for continuing this journey through this Pray More Healing Retreat. I really hope that these lectures that we've been offering for you have been helpful for you, been fruitful for you in your life. You've been able to take them to prayer, to just come to a great understanding of the Lord's goodness in your life. And so, my list, this my third lecture. I hope you've watched the first two. I'm trying to build sequentially on what we've been doing so far.

So, the first one we talked about memory, again, and the role of memory, how it plays out in our life, the importance of this. And then we shifted in the last lesson, we talked about examining hope and how looking at hope exactly is this future oriented process that we're setting goals, we're having desires or planning a way forward. We're anticipating obstacles. Those are wonderful, wonderful ways of being able to consider hope.

Hope More Than Your Regular Goals

But in this lecture, I want to go one step further. And I want to look at hope as not just a goal setting exercise, but as a theological virtue. So really when we think about hope, there's kind of two scenarios that I think at least that hope kind of manifests itself. The first one is kind of what we've been talking about, which is that things are going okay, more or less, or you're in a transition point in life and your kind of looking towards the future and trying to ask certain questions about what do I want to do next? What do I want to accomplish? What goals do I have? What desires to have? What are the things that I want to be able to do in the future that I believe are going to benefit my life and to put me in the best place to serve the Lord and His people? Okay, so it's good to be asking these questions.

So again, what we talked about last time was looking at goals, looking at our desire, our willpower, and then looking at our way power, that sense of agency, that capacity that the knowledge base that we need to be able to actualize those goals. And then of course also knowing when to engage and so having that space for prayer, that space for waiting, that space for understanding when the Lord is asking us to do that thing, okay? So certainly that's kind of, I think that that scenario plays out. Yeah, certainly when things are going all right, we're kind of look into the future making, like I said, making a transition, trying to move forward, trying to make things a little bit better.

But I do think that certainly there are moments in life when natural goals aren't sufficient because things happen in life. And so, there are certainly moments in life where we feel that we're underwater or that we feel that we're completely out of control with the circumstances that are being imposed upon us. Sometimes we lose a job. Sometimes a dream gets stashed. Sometimes our spouses get sick, or our parents get sick or our kids get sick or we lose a job. Or like I said, or

divorce happens unexpectedly, or a kid becomes an addict, all sorts of things that come upon us that we're not really anticipating. So certainly, we recognize that there are real sufferings and there are often these moments when we feel that we're out of control. And we're incapable of being able to just say, 'well let me just set up a goal and plan and let me move forward.' And justice happens to us. Suffering happens to us. And so how do we respond in those moments? How in those moments when we feel that we're underwater or we feel that we're suffocating by the pressures of life, do we cling to hope? And so, I think it's in those moments, that hope is also activated. And so that's what we want to be talking about as we move forward with this lecture, because in that space of hope, the only way they can really define or find hope in those tragedies of life is through our faith, is through our relationship with the Lord.

The Covid Anxiety

All right, so let me take a step here just to share stop here. What am I trying to say? Let me share a quick story with you guys, all right? So just rewind the clock with me, all right. Go back a couple years. You remember in 2020, here we are 2022, we're seemingly in the other side of this pandemic, we seemingly have an answer and can figure out and recognize what we should do, how to take appropriate precautions with COVID, how to respond, all of that stuff. But if you rewind the clock and remember two years ago, when we were all in this lockdown phase and the numbers that were coming out initially were crazy in terms of what we thought this thing was supposed to do. And they're talking about like 10% of the population dying. I mean, that's like billions of people in the world. I mean, that's millions of people, sorry, hundreds of millions of people. That's a lot, and we were thinking that it was going to get to that crazy number.

And so, we were all in lockdown between like March to June, basically for like three months that we were social distancing and washing our vegetables. You remember that? Go to the grocery store, we wash our vegetables. Or there was some study in The New York Times that said that like COVID could be passed through the mail and it could live on cardboard for 24 hours. And so, I remember myself like yelling at the kids when they would bring in the Amazon packages into the house before that 24-hour window happened.

Do you remember, all this was crazy. There was so much anxiety, so much uncertainty, so much fear that we had during that time, because none of us had ever lived through anything like this before. And so maybe kind of in may of that period, I myself was experiencing a lot of anxiety. Certainly, I'm grateful that I'm in a profession that I'm making do work like this remotely, whether it's doing virtual sessions or lessons like this, or even in my counseling practice. So financially we were okay, didn't lose my job. I was just able to pivot and to move into this kind of digital space, which I felt very comfortable doing.

But still there was a lot of fear, a lot of anxiety about my children, about what this is going to mean economically what's happening in the world. Are we going to get through this, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And so, I was having a conversation with my mom, my parents now we talk about like once a week or so. And so, I was having a conversation with my mom and my mom could pick up in my voice that I was experiencing a lot of anxiety. And the truth is no matter

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how old you are, you're still going to be your mother's son, your mother's daughter. And they're going to be able to pick up things in your voice or in you even if you're trying to hide it for them because they know you so well.

So, I was having this conversation, just talking to my mom and I wasn't even talking about that pandemic. I wasn't talking about anything, but I guess you could just kind of sense that I was experiencing a lot of anxiety. And so, my mom unsolicited just starts sharing the story of our immigration. And my story is that my parents, they left in Nicaragua because of a communist regime in the late 70s, excuse me, early 80s, 1981 is when my parents left, and I was but a child. I was one year old at the time. And we moved to the United States of America. And we moved here because as the American dream, to find a better place, my dad was a doctor in Nicaragua and had to kind of go through the process again, of becoming certified or licensed again in America. And that was about a 10, 12-year process for him.

So, we moved around a little bit. We moved to Baltimore and my dad after being an American doctor, the only job he was able to take was sticking lab animals at the University of Baltimore, Maryland, to put them to sleep while the biology students were doing research on them. My dad did that for a few years, opportunity presented some for him to pursue his residency and anesthesiology and Cook County Hospital in Chicago. So moved to Chicago and then eventually he became a full doctor after passing his board close to the age of 50. And so for 10 years, my parents genuinely suffered and sacrificed for us and immigrated to this country to give us a better future. So that's just a cliff, you know notes of this story, but I know the full story. My parents have shared it with me, a dozen times throughout my life. And so, my mom in this moment when I'm on this conversation with her two years ago, is recounting this story and she just simply says, like 'our family's been through a lot and we're going to get through this. It's going to be okay.'

What my mom was doing in that moment was instilling a sense of hope in my experience. And recognizing that our family has already been through many different challenges. Our family has already gone through immigrating to another country, where my parents didn't really speak this language where my dad had to fight hard to get us out, but then also to be able to work, towards getting us to a better space financially. So, my parents having overcome all of these different obstacles, my mom just gently shared that story with me. And it was exactly what I needed to be reminded.

As I said, in the first lesson, our memory, we can't lose track of our stories. We can't lose track of our history. Well, this is part of my family history, that my mom was reminding me of what my family history was. And to say, we've already been through a lot. There's no reason not to believe that we're not going to get through this also. So, let's just take a second to pause, to reflect, to see where we are in the grand scheme of things. And it's going to be okay. Wisdom, wisdom by my mom. Awesome, stuff that I can't even anticipate.

Life is Moving

And so, the reason that I shared this story with each and all of you is a reminder, is my mom reminded me that we're going to get through this, whatever you're going through, it's going to be okay. And that's just not optimism, but it's actually a theological truth that life is moving. Life is constantly moving forward. Time is constantly passing us by. Trials we may hold onto things we really can't. And so certainly some of us can look at that as with the sense of fear that time is blown by us.

But I also think that there's a real hope in that, because what that means is that there's no singular moment that can fully define the totality of our life. Both in success, certainly, as I'd shared in the last lesson, I was grateful to be able to receive my doctorate, but I looked at that as an accomplishment that was also moving us forward with life.

There are stories of Olympic athletes who trained their whole life to get that gold medal on them. When they get the gold medal, like their life falls apart because the meaning and the purpose of their whole life was entirely defined by pursuing that one thing. And then when that one thing happens, now what? Now What? For stories like that with professional football players or collegiate coaches that when they win the national championship similar, now what? What's the next thing?

Our life can't hang on one goal. Our life can't hang on one thing to be that one thing that's going to transform us. But similarly, that also means that even in the hardships and difficulties, even when we find ourselves stuck in a moment, as the U2 song goes, that those moments, if we see them and we acknowledge their presence, and we recognize that they're there, that we do the work that God is asking us to do, even in those moments that they can't break us. If we don't allow them to. That they certainly can shape us and mold us into different people. But that life, because it continues to move, that we continue to have the opportunity to move past whatever the hardship is.

This I think is also what Teresa of Avila was saying in her great poem. That only God is enough. Everything is passing. All things are passing. All things are passing. All things are passing. Life is moving. Life is journeying. God is inviting us into this story. God has allowed us to experience time and space because He is moving us, moving us towards our full destiny and our destiny ultimately rests in heaven.

We All Have Incompleteness

So, when we think about hope, I want to acknowledge a sense that life is kind of moving that even in the good times, that we can kind of not make an idol out of that. But then also the bad times, not make a soul defining moment out of that either. But recognizing that life continues to move on.

What this also speaks to is that we recognize if we're honest and humble within ourselves, even in the great moments we recognize and accept that there are certain limitations on our life, that there's a certain incompleteness that exists within us. This of course, harkens back to the idea the garden and Adam, even Adam in his beautiful created, perfectly created state where he's in the garden. And he has fruitful work. Literally his job is to till the land, his job is to name the animals. He's a scientist, he's doing his job. He's working, he's doing the things that God has asked him to do. And even being in this sense of freedom and newness of life and freedom from sin, even in that space, there is an incompleteness that he experiences. This is what John Paul II refers to as original solitude, that a recognition that in our space that we're never going to be capable of fully satisfying the desires of our hearts.

And so, what does God do? God answers that prayer, because He sees Adam's incompleteness and He answers the prayer. And what he does is that He brings woman into the fold and bringing woman into the fold that the word is used is not so much help me, but the word is actually more akin to savior. It's not the woman saves him, but that woman is an icon of salvation. What's another way of recognizing that, that she makes up that which he is lacking. It's a great way of thinking about salvation.

When we feel that we are lacking something, only God is capable of being able to make up that which we feel, that which we know, that which we experience as being incomplete. This of course we see beautifully in the garden and woman, but then of course in the fullness self-salvation happening in Jesus Christ, that when we succumbed to sin and not even just succumbing to sin, but even in our incompleteness at the original solitude that it wasn't just supposed to end in the garden. That our life is always, as we said, the destiny's, our life is always moving towards heaven. Our life was always moving towards heaven from the beginning, that was always the plan that we were supposed to be in full communion with the Holy Trinity.

A Theological Virtue

Now because of sin, the second person in Trinity incarnated himself and died on the cross and rose again for our sins to be able to once again, reestablish that pathway, this is the truth of the Church. And so, this faith that we profess, this truth, this acknowledgement of our incompleteness, this acknowledgement of our neediness for grace, this acknowledgement that even in the good times, that there's still something lacking within me. That that lack is what points me to God and God alone is that which can save me. Therefore, God alone is the only entity that can give me hope as I need it.

This is why the church professes that hope is a theological virtue. The difference between the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude, and then the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love is that the cardinal virtues are certainly these firm dispositions. These acquired habits that we can work on, that we can try to improve our life upon, by working on our prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, but the theological virtues of faith, hope and love can only come from God and God alone.

And so, if God is calling us to love, then the only way that we can love is by receiving the grace to love as God loves. Our faith we can only profess at the Holy Spirit is Lord. That Jesus is Lord by an act of the Holy Spirit. It's faith alone that allows us to even acknowledge it and recognize Christ in His love for us and the truths that the church proclaims about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit, about God, the Father.

Similarly, my dear friends, hope is a theological virtue. And what that means is that for us to be able to hope is to be able to receive the grace by God, to hope as he wants us to hope and to place the fullness of our hope solely in Him. So, hope is a wonderful, wonderful virtue that we have to understand, that we have to acquire that we have to grow in a deeper appreciation and recognition of what it does within our hearts within our lives.

So great quote here that I want to offer for you. This is coming from Josef Pieper, who's a German philosopher. He says this. He says, "In the virtue of hope, more than any other man understands and affirms that he is a creature that he has been created by God." "In the virtue of hope, more than any other man understands and affirms that he is a creature that he has been created by God," because we recognize our limitation. We recognize incompleteness and we recognize our neediness for salvation. That God is God and we are not.

The Book of Job

So great story here that really kind of nails this point home, right? Let's go back to the story of Job. When I've gone through different sufferings in my life, people have been like, hey man, read the Book of Job. The Book of Job's great. You ever read the Book of Job when you've some struggling, it's awful, awful. It's like the worst piece of pastoral advice that you can get to somebody. So we know the story, the story is that Job of course is well even before that, let's just kind of recap it all. Okay, here real quick.

The Book of Job begins with some celestial dinner party and God's having this party and all the angels are there. And somehow Satan manifests himself there at this party, and God's bragging about Job and be like, "Listen, Joe's my boy, Job takes good care of me, man. Job is faithful. And just look how good he is. Joe's my dude. That's my boy. That's my guy right there." And Satan's like, "Well, yeah, the only reason he's so good to you is because you're so good to him. Let me have Adam for a little bit and we'll see what happens."

So, God says, "You're on, do whatever you want, but don't kill him." All right, so the story then goes, as we all know that Job in all his prosperity's gone, his flock is gone. His wife and kids are dead. And even hitting himself is succumb to illness and he's completely by himself. And so this is the ultimate, why do bad things happen to good people type of story. This is the question of salvation. And so, Job is racking his brain trying to figure out what the heck happened and why all of this happened.

So, Job's friends come to the scene and they as well-intentioned friends, do they try to accompany him, but what they do is that they're really trying to get Job to confess what he did

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wrong because clearly the only way that he could be suffering this much is something bad must have happened in his life. He must have, not something bad. Excuse me, he must have committed some egregious, some grave, grave, grave, sin to deeply offend the Lord. So obviously only offending the Lord would all these things happen. And so, they're trying and Job though maintaining his innocence. Job's like, "Listen, I'm telling you guys like I did nothing wrong. I did nothing wrong. I did nothing wrong." And goes back and forth in defending his innocence and claiming his goodness and recognizing again that he did nothing wrong. So, this goes back and forth throughout the whole book. Finally, at the end Job kind of loses it and recognizes that, okay, now they've kind of broken me.

So, he asks this question and finally, in the end, God shows up and when God shows up, you read it and you're like, man, God's going to explain everything to him. God's going to give all the details about like the celestial dinner party and how he was bragging about Job and Satan shows up at this party and makes his bargain and the whole bit and explains everything. That's what I was expecting. At least when I'm reading this for the first time, that's not what happens, God shows up. And then he says, "All right, listen, you got questions, I got questions for you." And so, then He challenges Job and starts asking, "Where were you when I separated the water from the heavens to the waters of the earth? Where were you when I arranged the stars in the perfect order in the sky? And where were you when I separated the light from the darkness?" And I'm getting the order mixed up here, but the point is that, but the Lord asks Job is where were you basically, when I created the entire universe? Where were you when I put all the pieces together of life in existence in the cosmos and your experience in the stories of your families and the stories of your great nation? Where were you when I did all of that. And Job, of course humbly says, "I wasn't, I wasn't present in any of those things."

And so, the first time that I read that I was frustrated, and I was like, God, just give them the answer, right? Don't we all just want the answer? Don't when we're suffering, we just want to know why is this happening to me? What's the purpose behind this? Why exactly is this unfolding the way that it's unfolding in my life? Why couldn't this just be easier? Those are the questions that we often demand of the Lord when we are experiencing severe suffering and what the Lord's doing in this moment with Job isn't that He's being pejorative, but He's just reminding Job, reminding Job that this is a journey that is unfolding and He's reminding Job that He is God. And that Job is not, God is God, and we are not.

And recognizing our creativeness, recognizing our finiteness, our limitations of time and space of perspective that we cannot see as God sees. We cannot fully understand the story as it is unfolding. This is the lesson that God has given to Job, not in a pejorative demeaning way, but as a Father, as a Father reminding Job, that he has loved that he's being taken care of, that God is orchestrating all of these events or allowing these events to unfold in a particular way, to be able to bring about the greatest sense of good in his life and in our lives.

So I know that that's a hard story for us to be able to hold onto because it's a story that requires us to have supreme faith in the Lord, understanding of what it means to be prudent, where we're supposed to engage what we're supposed to change, but what we're supposed to let go of also, and what we're supposed to surrender and complete trust and faithfulness to God, because I reiterate brothers and sisters. We are not God. I'm not God, you're not God, my mom's not God.

None of us are God. We are just creatures journeying in life together. But God, as our Father is reminding us that He, the same God who can put the earth in the exact place where it needs to be in relation to the sun so that we can live and then for the earth to be able tilt, in the way that it was tilted so that we can have seasons. And so that the majority of the planet could have life that we can have protection from the outer planets in the solar system, that we could have a moon that just so happens to be the exact distance from the sun so that we can have lunar eclipses that's also just so happens to be the exact distance from the shadow of the earth so that we can have, excuse me, solar eclipses, so that we can also have lunar eclipses. It's crazy. The amount of precision that is required for us to be where we are. And it is the Lord and the Lord alone who has created all of this for us to live and to be in communion with Him.

Take a Step Back

So, my brothers and sisters, I'm encouraging you this day to take a step back, even in the midst of your pain and to acknowledge and recognize your limitations. And so I want to offer this final verse here, as we bring this lesson to conclusion, St. Paul says in Romans 5:1-5, he says, ***"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith." Excuse me, "Through whom we have gained access to this grace by faith in which we stand."***

And we boast in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance and endurance proven character and proven character hope and hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. We boast of what? We boast of the hope that is in the glory of God. Why? Because we boast of our affliction. What do afflictions do? We know that affliction does what it produces endurance and what does endurance do? Endurance produces proven character. And why is that a matter? Because that right there is what God is after. God certainly gives us desires and certainly successes and failures when things happen. But at the end of the day, what the Lord is asking and what he's pursuing is our heart, our character, our transformation of our personhood.

And in these sufferings, we have the opportunity to produce good fruit, to produce proven character and proven character does what? It produces hope. A genuine hope, a sincere hope, a hope that does not disappoint, a hope that says, God, even as I'm going through this trial right now, I recognize and fully believe and acknowledge in your goodness and acknowledge in your providence. And even if I cannot see it, Lord, I know that you're doing something. And because you have led me through these previous experiences in my life, and because I've been able to see how I've grown as a result of those moments, I know Lord that you are doing something inside of me now. And so, God guide me, God save me, God, make up that which I am lacking. God give me hope. God give us hope.

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And so, brothers and sisters, wherever you find yourselves today, whatever challenges you may be experiencing, bring them before the Lord, allow the Lord to give you His hope, His faith, so that you can grow in His love in capacity to be able to receive His love, but also be able to give it to others. So, God bless you. Thank you so much, looking forward to being with you for one final lesson.