

Healing as a Result of Prayer, Praying with Art **Katie Weiss**

Hi, my name is Katie Weiss. And today we're going to be talking about Healing As a Results of Prayer, specifically through the realm of Visio Divina or Praying With Art. So, I thought we'd start with a prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Almighty God we gave you our joys and our sorrows, all the places of our hearts, places that we have given to you and the places that we are afraid to go. Bring all the things that you have healed in our hearts, but also the things that we desire healing. We ask all this through the intercession of Our Lady Hail Mary, full of grace the Lord is with the 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. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Katie's Story

So, I thought I'd start our talk on Visio Divina in particular with a witness story. Because Visio Divina is what I do for living. It's a ministry that I have, and it would help you understand a little bit about why I do what I do, but also that I firmly believe in the power of praying with art and Scripture and hope that you find it as powerful as I have found it in my own life.

So, I thought I'd share a little bit about my background, where I come from. So, I was the third oldest of seven children. I was raised in a Catholic family and grew up with just a love for the faith, a passion for the faith and a lot of formation. And I really grew a lot in understanding what the church taught which had its benefits. I was raised with the sacraments. I was raised with understanding the faith, but I can honestly say I didn't have that deep encounter with the Lord until I was about 20 years old. And a lot of my story of the impact of praying with art in my own life really goes back to the time I was 10 years old. So when I was 10, I saw a video of Mother Teresa and I saw her helping the poor on the streets.

And right away, I knew that's something I wanted to do in different ways, right? So, at the time in fifth grade, I was convinced I would be a missionary in Calcutta and then it kind of developed into, well I want to serve others. And I think I love teaching. So, I would love to be a religious sister in a teaching order. And so, 10 years later, when I'm 20 years old I encounter a religious community of sisters who teach in Catholic schools. And I fell in love with the community. I visited their mother house, fell in love with it. Applied, got accepted and entered in August 2013.

And so, while I was there in religious life, I lived as a postulate which is the first year of living religious life. So, you wear this outfit, it's kind of like a schoolgirl outfit, at least with the community I was, you don't wear the veil yet. You don't have a new name yet, but you're living the schedule getting up at 5:00 AM. You're doing prayer with the sisters. You're helping at the mother house. We also were openly talking about name choices and also sowing or habits. So, it

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was an experience of living religious life for a good year of my life. And so, I entered religious life, brought my desires that I've had for 10 years to this vocational discernment and find something that I didn't expect while in religious life, which was I was deeply unhappy. And I was afraid to see that.

So, some of you might relate to this in just any area of your life where you know what the truth is, but you're hoping that's not the truth. So, I know for me, what I end up doing is I try to find other reasons why that thing is happening. Kind of give excuses, but at the time I don't realize their excuses, so for example, enter religious life was finding a few weeks in, I'm deeply unhappy, and actually was struggling a lot with anxiety and depression.

And what ended up happening was I started blaming different things. So, I was like maybe it's the fact that, yeah, maybe it's the fact that I just entered recently and I'm still adjusting. Or maybe it's this one wound in the past. And so, trying to tackle those things. And after about a few months I was still afraid of looking at the truth. And at this point I came across an image by Fra Angelico. And some of you might be familiar with this image, it's his Annunciation image. And one of my art history teachers or my church history teachers gave us a four by four image that I still have of Fra Angelico's Annunciation. And I had encountered that painting before but had never really found a connection with it until this moment. And for some reason I found it deeply healing and consoling and comforting, especially with anxiety and depression.

So, some of you might relate when you're struggling with anxiety or depression, you have a swirl of thoughts all the time that it's hard to pray. And so here I am in religious life, going to prayer all day every day, finding it difficult to pray. And yet this image was the first place I could really find that comfort. And the reason was I related to Mary. So, every morning I had that image up and I had Luke's gospel open up and it said Mary was afraid. And the angel Gabriel said, "Do not be afraid Mary." And I found that really striking to me because I was afraid And yet I didn't have the courage or the words to say I'm afraid. I was afraid of being afraid in front of the Lord. And I was afraid that He would reject me if I was honest with Him. And Mary taught me to go to those messy places and to talk with Her about them.

So in that place I could say, oh, Mary, you were afraid. I'm scared too. I don't know what to do. I think the Lord might be calling me out of religious life but I've thought about this for 10 years. I don't know what that's going to be like. That's a lot of uncertainty. And I found Mary there. I found Jesus there. I felt love there. And so, praying with this sacred art and Scripture was really vocational for me to take the step to discern out of religious life and really pursue who God had created me to be. And even after that, the grief and the loss that I experienced to be able to find my worth in Him as a beloved daughter of God versus what I try to earn His love by what I did. And so I found deep healing through praying with art.

Understanding Healing

I thought I'd go through a little bit of a deeper understanding of what healing is before we plunge into it. So, we're talking about healing found through prayer and I thought I'd talk about the word healing. So, if you go back to the earliest form of the word healing, it comes from the word help, the old English word help which means wholeness of being whole, being sound or well. And I

thought this was a great definition because I know for myself in my own journeys of understanding what healing is, I've often had misconceptions about what healing is. Whether I've over spiritualized it and if there's emotional healing I needed or physical healing I can over spiritualize it sometimes and think that if I just do one thing spiritually, it will go away, which healing can happen through prayer. But then also there are other avenues because we're whole persons that we're body and soul. And so true healing comes through an integration. Integration also comes from an understanding of wholeness, that God became man and so likewise, we're body and soul.

You'll probably notice this in prayer where if your body is sick, it's harder, it feels like your prayer is having difficulty sometimes. Or I know for me, if something emotional is going on, it can really affect my prayer and the other way around, right, spiritually. So if I have an attachment to a certain sin, it can have physical implications. And so I thought I'd talk about that with prayer as healing, because yes, prayer has an impact but it's intertwined with the emotional and the physical. And there's so much that we can desire healing through and with prayer.

Jesus and the Paralyzed Man

I thought I'd share a little bit about an example of this with the passage of Jesus' Healing the Paralyzed Man. So, Jesus comes across the paralyzed man in the Bible, in Mark's Gospel and what happens is the paralyzed man's friends lift him in through the roof, but Jesus says your sins are forgiven. And then the Pharisees questioned in their hearts who is this man who can forgive sins? And Jesus responds to them, you know, just to show His power of forgiving sins. He also heals the man physically, right? He says, rise, pick up your mat and go home.

And so He's showing us this integration of spiritual and physical, which is really important for us. So, I thought that would be a good inspiration for us as we go through this retreat on finding healing. So true healing is prayer that is incarnational. And a lot of Visio Divina or praying with sacred art and Scripture is really closely linked to Ignatian prayer. So, Saint Ignatius talked a lot about using the imagination or the senses in prayer. And this goes back to a lot of our understanding of God becoming man, right? The fact that God became man at the nativity and He took on a human body. He's fully God and fully man. And with that, we have to encounter Him through our whole selves, our body and our soul, our emotions, our wills. There's just so many realms that we can go through in deeper healing. And this can overlap through healing through memories and what we can touch on that later in another video. But there isn't importance to that in our healing as well. And it can lead to emotional, spiritual and physical healing.

Visio Divina

So, I thought I'd overview What Visio Divina is. I've been using this term and probably at this point you're like, okay, you've talked about Visio Divina. You've talked about praying with art and Scripture, but I don't know how to do this. And also, what is this? Is this a word from another language or English because I've never heard this word in English. And you are right in that realm, it is a Latin word. And if you're familiar with Lectio Divina, Visio Divina is very similar. So Lectio Divina is Latin for divine hearing. So, at mass, we hear the lectionary, we hear

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God's word. So Lectio Divina is divine hearing. Visio Divina, a way I like to explain it is vision, our word vision is tied to Visio. So, it's the Latin four divine seeing. And it means we encounter God through sacred art and His word, So He's present in His word today just as He was present through all the ages, right? He's present to us very tangibly through prayer. And using an image can kind of help that encounter with the Lord through Scripture.

But this goes back to the history of the church. So if you walk into a church and see stained glass, that's an example of Visio Divina. And in the history of the church, stained glass was a way to teach people who were illiterate, people who couldn't read about the gospel. It was a way to meet Jesus when people couldn't read God's word and we still see it, in stained glass windows today or another example is Stations of the Cross.

So, whether or not you knew it was Visio Divina, Stations of the cross, if you've prayed Stations of the Cross during Lent, you've been practicing Visio Divina, right? You're looking at an image, you're pondering it. You're reflecting on it. You see, I'm picturing in my head, Mary encountering Jesus on the way of the cross and your heart is moved because of that. And so we're going to do Visio Divina kind of in a similar way. So usually I give a framework of steps on how to prayer with art and Scripture for people to use. And you don't have to follow it as a steadfast rule, but it's usually just stepping stones to get you to deeper prayer.

Steps to start Visio Divina

So, the steps of Visio, the first step is Visio, which is looking at an image. And this can be an uncomfortable place for a lot of people. Because a lot of times in our social media, and our very busy world we can just scroll, right? And so a lot of it is being present, sitting with an image for a long time, I journal on the margins, be aware of what's striking you, maybe place yourself in the scene. Imagine what it would've sounded like or felt like.

The second step is meditation. So sitting with God's word, being aware of what's striking you, whether it's a word or a phrase. Taking that to prayer, maybe going back to the image. The third step is prayer. And the way I like to kind of lead that step is to ask some deeper questions with the Lord. So, if a word or a phrase is striking me to say, Lord what does this mean to me? What are you saying to me? Or if I relate to something in the image such as Mary's fear at the Annunciation, I started talking to Mary saying, you were afraid. What were you afraid about? Or even just saying, I'm afraid, can you help me, help show me how to walk through this fear?

The next step is contemplation. And I like to give the image of couples or significant friends or family that you feel very comfortable with. And you have a comfortable relationship with that you're able to just rest in their presence. You don't need to say anything. And so I like to give that as an example of just resting in God's presence. Contemplation.

Finally, the last step is action. How am I going to live out from this time of prayer in a practical way? So coming up with either saying, Jesus I trust in you when you're afraid or invoking Mary's help, something tangible that you can do from this time of prayer.

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So before you try this on your own, just wanted to give a few notes to encourage you. Jesus wants your heart, so don't hold back. Even the places that you feel are messy know that he desires to enter into relationship with you. He wants that from you. And it can be a beautiful space of relationship and intimacy in a place that you have often felt shame or guilt or fear. Don't be afraid trust where the spirit is leading you, So if you want to sit with the image longer or the Scripture longer, trust yourself. Go ahead and sit with it longer. It's really adaptable to the person.

Also, I wanted to encourage you to do discernment of spirits and prayer. So a lot of deeper under hard work can happen praying with art and scripture. And the important note I like to give is Jesus is comforting. So even if you go into places that are difficult or hard there's a love or a presence of comfort or love there, an encouraging voice. If there is a discouraging voice or a shame that is not of the Lord. So just to kind of redirect your prayer to where you're finding the Holy Spirit. Also, Jesus is the word. So to go ahead and pay attention to the ways He's striking you through sacred art and Scripture.

Finally Visio Divina is a call to relationship. So if you have not had that deep relationship with the Lord, don't worry, don't be afraid. I just want to encourage you that we all have these reversion or conversion moments in our life. And I hope that sharing my story is encouragement that no matter where you are in life, that the Lord desires to be with you and He loves you. And I hope this is an opportunity to go to those difficult spaces with Him to enter into the places you desire healing and to encounter Him there. So I'm really looking forward to you applying these at home and in your own prayer and finding benefit and fruit from them. And I hope this was encouraging for you to follow along with.

Closing Prayer

So, we'll close with a prayer. *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning is now and never shall be world without end. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Thank you so much for joining me for this talk. And God bless.