

## Reflection Questions

- What spiritual gifts has God given you and how have you lovingly shared those gifts with others?
  - What does the black hole of your own self-regard look like?
  
- How have you found freedom from self-centered ambitions through the process of working the twelve steps of recovery?
  
- Can you recall a moment or moments when you have shared something with others and experienced a loving reaction rather than one of condemnation?
  - What was that like?

## Sunday Mass Readings This Week

**1st Reading:** Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 71:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 15-17

**2nd Reading:** 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

**Gospel:** Luke 4:21-30

## 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time



We have been hearing from Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians over the past two weeks and will continue to do so heading into Lent. Themes of unique spiritual gifts and our contribution to the Body of Christ set the stage for this week's second reading:

*Brothers and sisters:  
Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts.  
But I shall show you a still more excellent way.*

*If I speak in human and angelic tongues,  
but do not have love,  
I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.  
And if I have the gift of prophecy,  
and comprehend all mysteries and all  
knowledge;  
if I have all faith so as to move mountains,  
but do not have love, I am nothing.  
If I give away everything I own,  
and if I hand my body over so that I may boast,  
but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

What is love? We will hear some characteristics in a moment but in order for love to inform our behavior and attitude, we must uncover what it is and what it is not. As per Bishop Robert Barron, “To love is to break free of the black hole of our own self-regard and truly to want what is good for the other.”

It does not mean to do good for another for our own sake or to cater to another’s requests because they will, in turn, like us more. Love is willing to put aside our ego for the good of the other. Saint Paul continues:

*Love is patient, love is kind.  
It is not jealous, it is not pompous,  
It is not inflated, it is not rude,  
it does not seek its own interests,  
it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over  
injury,  
it does not rejoice over wrongdoing  
but rejoices with the truth.  
It bears all things, believes all things,  
hopes all things, endures all things.*

This is the kind of love expressed in the rooms of recovery. We unite on equal ground as beloved sons and daughters of God who *need* His grace each day. We are blessed with a fellowship rooted in humility, openness, and honesty. We bear the suffering of the newcomer whose shoes we have stood in. When a member takes a step back or acts out in their addiction, we welcome them back with love knowing that they have a chance to experience a new freedom and happiness.

The twelve steps of addiction recovery and the sacraments of the Catholic Church dovetail together to fill our spirits with love. First, we often have to rid ourselves of self-centered pride and egotism which can prevent us from knowing the love of God. Admitting powerlessness over addiction and unhealthy attachments opens us up to receive divine love from others.

Isolation, withdrawal, and secret-keeping ensure that we will remain in the black hole of our own self-regard and blocked from the fullness of God’s love. Instead, we surrender all to Him including the results of our recovery and the plan to carry it out. Our fearless and moral inventory (step 4) helps uncover the truth and seeks to overcome dishonesty with ourselves, God, and others as we share it with a trusted sponsor and in the Sacrament of Confession.

The mystery of God’s plan for us will continue to be revealed. We can learn much from the experience of others and by relying on God to direct our will. Jesus was sent to bring glad tidings to the poor and to proclaim liberty to captives. Today, we have a chance to receive His grace and to choose faith, hope, and love.