

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!

This line begins the Liturgy of the Word this Sunday, directing our attention to the things that are of Christ. This same transition happens as we participate in 12-step recovery. When our priorities change, we begin to see truth, beauty, and goodness in all things, although with a proper perspective.

A common phrase in recovery groups is "don't leave before the miracle happens." This implies that some transformation is bound to come with a commitment to 12-step addiction recovery and sacramental life of the Church. We often hear similar expressions in recovery and Christian language. "Spiritual awakening," "psychic change," "die to self," or "raised with Christ" all imply a radical reordering of our life around God. This is a key component to finding freedom from lust addiction, sexual compulsions, and other unhealthy attachments.

Saint Paul begins this Sunday's Second Reading stressing the importance of this radical reorientation. "If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God," he notes. He then offers a formula for right living and directly speaks to the values of recovery:

Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator.

It is helpful to consider what Saint Paul refers to as *the greed that is idolatry*. Here, Paul shares that our self-centered attitudes and behaviors are barriers to renewed life. Idolatry, meaning the worship of idols or things not of God, is something that we come to know very well in active addiction. Our lives were once ordered around meeting our lustful needs while everything else seemed insignificant.

Even after we have found freedom from lust and sexual addiction, we must remain committed to seeking what is above. Otherwise, we are likely to replace addictive behaviors and attitudes with an attachment to power, pleasure, honor, or wealth. Our readings this week speak to the fleeting nature of anything not of God, yet we can spend a lifetime expecting fulfillment from these idols.

Reflection Questions

A less familiar, yet equally important phrase spoken in recovery groups is "don't leave *after* the miracle happens." The real gift of recovery is the freedom that comes with ordering our lives around God. We may experience secondary benefits, such as career opportunities, reliable friendships, the ability to maintain a romantic relationship, or the return of our health, to name a few. However, the real treasure is found in the immaterial.

The life-or-death nature of recovery can fade and, in time, so will the freedom we have come to know if we do not stay faithful to the spiritual practices that helped us find freedom. Our new self can leave idolatry behind with the humble recognition that it is God who provides our daily bread. Everything else is vanity.

- How have your values and priorities shifted since beginning recovery?
 - What idols have been set aside in an effort to order your life around God?

- In addition to freedom from lust addiction, sexual compulsions, and other unhealthy attachments, what secondary benefits have you experienced in recovery?

Catholic in Recovery Retreats

Find a Catholic in Recovery retreat near you or inquire about hosting one in your community

- CIR retreats offers time and space to deepen your recovery through personal testimonies, engaging the sacraments, CIR meetings, talks, and fellowship
- Remaining 2022 weekend retreats will be held in Akron, OH (Aug 19-21), Newton, NJ (Sept 23-25), and Wichita, KS (Nov 4-6)
- Register today at catholicinrecovery.com/events

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17

Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

Gospel: Luke 12:13-21