

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time



This Sunday's Gospel Reading tells a well-known story of a family that thought they lost a loved one to addiction, but ultimately got to witness his return and recovery—the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Twelve-step recovery is meant to be lived by addicts and those of us who have been impacted by the family disease of addiction. When overlapped with the sacraments of the Catholic Church, even the most challenged among us can find a life of joy regardless of our loved one's sobriety status. Certainly, if they do get well, we surely do not want to be stuck in resentment and anger.

Realizing our powerlessness and need for Christ allows God to make a new creation of us. Reconciliation is made possible by the blood of Jesus who calls us to pick up our cross as we make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. By sharing it with Him, ourselves, and another human being, we begin to find freedom from resentment and fear.

Transformation may happen quickly, or it may happen slowly. Either way, we do not have to wait for God to meet us along the way. The Parable of the Prodigal Son tells the account of a pleasure-seeking son who asks his father for his inheritance and then squanders it on drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, and moral debauchery. Upon hitting rock bottom, the son decides to return to the father for help:

*Coming to his senses he thought,
'How many of my father's hired workers
have more than enough food to eat,
but here am I, dying from hunger.
I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to
him,
"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against
you.
I no longer deserve to be called your son;
treat me as you would treat one of your hired
workers."
So he got up and went back to his father.
While he was still a long way off,
his father caught sight of him, and was filled with
compassion.
He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.*

This story captures the merciful love of the father and the saving grace received by the younger, prodigal son. However, it does not end there as Jesus remarks on the experience of the elder son. Filled with self-righteousness, the older son scorns at his father's acceptance of the prodigal, making a case for himself while pointing out the unfair nature of the father's embrace. Divine love tends to be unfair, yet we can be quick to point it out when it's not in our benefit.

Reflection Questions

We must be careful not to fall into bitter angst like the older son when witnessing our loved ones or others around us turn their lives around but not on our terms. It is not uncommon for family members of addicts to pray for their recovery from a seemingly hopeless condition then, when they actually do turn things around, criticize the path it took to get sober.

Therefore, it is important for us to make a daily commitment to surrender ourselves to God's will and take on the compassionate attitude of the prodigal's father. As 12-step recovery literature explains:

"Recovery from the effects of another's alcoholism involves our changing old attitudes that don't work for us and replacing them with attitudes that do work, replacing attitudes that encourage us to feel badly about ourselves and others with those that allow us to view the world more positively. We learn to see several options where we once saw none at all, and we begin to look at our lives in a new and exciting way. Such a major transformation cannot happen overnight, and none of us, even the most dedicated, can do it alone. We need help, guidance, and a fresh perspective. Most of all, we need to practice what we learn" (*How Al-Anon Works*, p. 37-38).

- How have resentment and anger related to another person's addiction stifled your joy? What part have you played in allowing it to happen?
- How do you relate to the characters in the Parable of the Prodigal Son?
- What old attitudes have passed away as you have taken on the identity as a child of God? What new ones have come?

Catholic in Recovery Resources Online

Visit catholicinrecovery.com for a variety of resources related to addiction recovery and the Catholic Church:

- Articles published weekly related to various types of addictions, the impact of addiction on families, practical application of the Twelve Steps and sacraments, and more
- Full directory of virtual and in-person meetings available
- Read testimonials of CIR community members
- Enroll in the Catholic in Recovery Novena
- Pre-order *The Catholic in Recovery Workbook*

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 17, 19

Second Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Gospel: Luke 15:1-32