

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time



When asked why he ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus responds, "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners" (Luke 5:31-32). Making a regular—even daily—return to the Lord with a humble awareness that we were powerless over addiction, an open mind to what His will for us might be, and a willingness to carry it out keeps us properly aligned with the hope offered by God's grace and mercy.

We can take practical actions to remain in this state of conversion. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* outlines several exercises that aid us on a regular basis: "Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, exercise and defense of justice and right, by admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance" (1435).

Properly working Step 2—"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity"—helps shape our relationship with God and opens us up to having a prayerful, active relationship with Him. This is necessary as we cry out for help and rely on Him for recovery. This Sunday's first reading affirms that God hears our humble appeals (Sirach 35:15-20):

*The Lord is a God of justice,
who knows no favorites.
Though not unduly partial toward the weak,
yet he hears the cry of the oppressed.
The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan,
nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.
The one who serves God willingly is heard;
his petition reaches the heavens.*

In most settings, we are culturally conditioned to lead with our strengths and hide our weaknesses. In recovery from addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments, we benefit from leading with our weaknesses so that others can identify with our path toward freedom and our mutual reliance on a Power greater than ourselves. In weakness there is unity and in unity, victory.

Taking up our cross each day becomes easier when we travel together. Our judgments of others prevent us from fully knowing God, ourselves, and our fellow brothers and sisters. It can be easier to note what others have done wrong rather than looking inward at our own behavior. We call this taking other peoples' inventory, which Jesus warns against in this Sunday's Gospel reading (Luke 18:10-14):

*“Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector.
The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself,
'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector.
I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.'
But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed,
'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'
I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former;
for whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows our strengths, our weaknesses, our fears, and our desires. Humbly accepting ourselves by taking our own inventory and carrying the cross we've been given frees us to make spiritual progress and continuous conversion. We are not worthy that He should enter under our roof. However, Christ does not ask us to be worthy; He asks that we follow Him. We can do this together, one day at a time.

Reflection Questions

- What helps you return to God daily with honesty and humility?
- How does the tax collector's prayer—"God, be merciful to me, a sinner"—speak to your own experience of recovery?
- What does it mean for you to “take up your cross” and follow Christ in the context of your healing from addiction, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Exodus 17:8-13

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 121:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2

Gospel: Luke 18:1-8