

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Each one of us has stood at a turning point where the cycle of addiction met a window of grace and we became willing to do what we previously would not do: ask for help and follow a new set of directions. In that moment, self-reliance turns into a need for God, leaving us with what we might call a poverty of spirit. We may not have chosen the circumstances that brought us there, but we can choose what we do with the openness that follows.

To be poor in spirit means we stop pretending we can run our lives on self-will alone. It means becoming an empty vessel, available for the grace of God to be poured in. Just like clay has to be soft and malleable for a potter to shape it, we are called to humility that allows God to take the lead. Rather than seeking comfort from our addictions, compulsions, or unhealthy attachments, we begin to find solace in something quieter and stronger—living another day sober, abstinent, balanced, clean, or free. We get to live with the integrity of daily action that strengthens our recovery and our reliance on God's grace.

It can be easy to confuse desperation with courage. We might be more willing to pursue the will of God when we are bruised by consequences than when things seem to be going well. Yet recovery teaches us to capitalize on that early willingness and build long lasting traits that keep us devoted to God and our program. The goal is not to stay desperate. The goal is to stay willing.

Both 12-step recovery and the Catholic faith offer guideposts for what a joyful life looks like. One of the most direct descriptions is found in this Sunday's gospel reading (Matthew 5:1-10), as Jesus proclaims the Beatitudes to an attentive crowd:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Desperation begins to mature into courage when we practice spiritual disciplines after the dust settles. Many of us can stay willing when life is on fire. The deeper work is staying willing when life feels calm and our old patterns try to whisper that we are fine on our own. This is why we keep showing up to meetings, maintain a simple routine of prayer and meditation, seek the sacraments, and offer ourselves in service. We do these things not to prove our worth, but to remain available to God.

Complacency is a real threat in recovery. The Big Book warns, "It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 85). When we stop tending to our spiritual condition, our poverty of spirit can quietly turn into self-reliance again. We can recalibrate by returning to the basics: honest inventory, reaching out for support, renewing Step work, taking on a service commitment, and asking God each day to show us His will.

In this way, the Beatitudes become more than inspiring words. They become a pattern of living. When we live poor in spirit, we stay teachable. When we practice mercy, we stay free. When we make peace, we stay close to God. The kingdom of heaven is not far off. It begins now, one day at a time.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where do you notice self-reliance creeping back in, and what helps you return to poverty of spirit?
- Which Beatitude challenges you most right now, and why?
- What concrete practice helps you maintain your spiritual condition when life feels stable or comfortable?

MASS READINGS

FIRST READING Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

SECOND READING 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

GOSPEL Matthew 5:1-12a