

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Each one of us has stood at a turning point where the cycle of lust 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 manage lust with willpower, secrecy, or mental bargaining. 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 in fantasy, acting out, or distorted intimacy, we begin to find solace in something quieter and stronger—living another day sober and sexually healthy, grounded in honesty and accountability. 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 surrender when shame is fresh or consequences are heavy than when life feels stable. Yet recovery teaches us to capitalize on that early willingness and build long lasting traits that keep us devoted to God and our healing. 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."

For those of us recovering from lust addiction, the Beatitudes describe a new interior life. "Clean of heart" is not about perfection or never being tempted. It is about becoming undivided again, where our thoughts and choices are brought into the light and ordered toward love. We learn to grieve what lust has cost us, not to sink into shame, but to let God comfort and rebuild us. Meekness becomes strength that does not dominate or consume. Hunger and thirst for righteousness becomes a real desire for integrity, not just in public, but in private as well.

This is where desperation matures into courage. We practice the disciplines of recovery after the crisis passes. We keep reaching out, telling the truth quickly, and staying accountable even when we would rather isolate. We pray before we scroll, pause before we fantasize, and choose the next right action when an urge rises. Over time, God

reshapes our hearts. Peace becomes possible because we are no longer hiding. The kingdom of heaven draws near as we live honest and free, one day at a time.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where do you most often try to manage lust through secrecy, bargaining, or self-will?

- What does being "clean of heart" look like for you in practical, daily choices?

- What specific action helps you stay in the light when temptation or isolation shows up?

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