

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 in a way that we became willing to do what we previously would not—ask for help and follow a new set of directions. In that moment (from which some of us may not be far removed), self-reliance turns into desperation for God, leaving us with what we might consider a poverty of spirit.

To be poor in spirit means to be 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 a state of humility that allows God control of our will and our lives. Rather than seeking comfort from our addictions, compulsions, or unhealthy attachments, we can instead find solace brought from living another day sober, abstinent, clean, or free! We get to live with the integrity of taking daily action to strengthen our recovery and reliance on God's grace.

It can be easy to confuse desperation for courage. We might be more willing to pursue the will of God when we're bruised by the consequences of our addicted behavior than we are when all has been going well. Yet, we can capitalize on our desperate willingness to develop long-lasting traits which keep us devoted to God and our recovery.

Both 12-step recovery and the Catholic faith have various guideposts for what traits or virtues will lead to a joyful life. One of the most exemplary of these can be found in this Sunday's Gospel Reading 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 transitions to courage when we practice healthy spiritual exercises even after the dust of our inappropriate behavior settles. We continue to attend meetings, maintain a healthy routine of prayer and meditation, offer ourselves in service to others, and seek reliance on God—not because we have to, but because we know the measure of joy and purpose offered by a life of recovery.

Sometimes our commitment to recovery needs to be rejuvenated. As the Big Book of *Alcoholics Anonymous* notes, "It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels" (p. 85). Complacency is a dangerous state-of-being for those who are impacted by addiction. We can recalibrate our recovery by working (or re-working) through the Twelve Steps, taking on a new service position, trying new meetings, attending a retreat, or committing to a daily meeting for a length of time.

In order to remain sober we must continue to do what we did to get sober. In essence, that means maintaining a poverty of spirit and aligning with the principles of the beatitudes taught by Jesus. "What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. 'How can I best serve Thee—Thy will (not mine) be done.' These are thoughts which must go with us constantly" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 85).

Reflection Questions

- How do you understand the phrase "blessed are the poor in spirit" and when have you experienced it?
- Which of the beatitudes do you find yourself most drawn to today? Explain.
- Has your recovery needed to be recalibrated or rejuvenated and, if so, what did you do?

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- **March 24-26 - St. Benedict Lodge in McKenzie Bridge, OR**
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- **June 2-4 - Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Hanceville, AL**
- **October 13-15 - Spiritual Life Center in Wichita, KS**
- Register online at catholicinrecovery.com/events

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Zephania 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