

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time



For those new to recovery, the opening line of this Sunday's Liturgy of the Word might be difficult to accept. Discussions of holiness can be found in both our First and Second Readings this week, perhaps provoking the response, "What an order, I can't go through with it!" or, "Of course I'm holy." This week's First Reading begins:

*The Lord said to Moses,
"Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell
them:
Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.*

At face value, this can seem like an impossible task for any of us. Especially as we're confronted with the circumstances of our families, we might carry some shame as we attempt to approach God. Fortunately, this is not the case, as the author of Leviticus then goes on to describe holiness as the compassionate treatment of our neighbor—something we are all capable of.

Building on the theme of our local church acting as a field hospital after battle, it is valuable for us to consider our attitude toward holiness, perfection, and spiritual progress. Remember, an important recovery principle is that we claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection. Scripture affirms this truth as Saint Paul writes, "As it is written, there is no one just, not one; for all have sinned and fell short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 23).

God meets us where we are, although He does not want us to stay there. Thanks to the saving grace of recovery fellowships and the sacramental life of the Church, we are guided by the path of progress paved by others who have been in our shoes. We grow in holiness—or the capacity to treat our neighbor with compassion—as we work through the Twelve Steps and form new healthy patterns.

The Twelve Steps are ordered in a way that penetrates through our denial and allows us to clearly see the impact addiction has had on us and our families. Relationships that were once compromised by our reaction to addiction can be restored by surrendering our will and lives over to God, working through an honest personal inventory with a sponsor, sharing the nature of our wrongs with God and another person, asking Him to remove our shortcomings, and making amends to those we hurt.

Loving our neighbor requires courage and humility as we recognize our part in the process of disconnection. Moments of reconciliation are powerful when we lead with our own failings and honestly explore how to make things right.

Jesus remains fixed on the idea of reconciliation and making amends. While it can be a challenging process, God invites us to extend His love and mercy to everyone, not just to the people we like. Jesus explains in this Sunday's Gospel Reading:

*“You have heard that it was said,
You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.
But I say to you, love your enemies
and pray for those who persecute you,
that you may be children of your heavenly Father,
for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good,
and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.
For if you love those who love you,
what recompense will you have?”*

The Twelve Steps and sacramental life of the Church are structured to progressively facilitate amends, reconciliation, and a spiritual awakening. Step Eight instructs us to make a list of all persons we had harmed and become willing to make amends to them all. We might be reluctant to make amends to those we feel have also injured us. Our willingness will grow if we pray for such people, even if we begin without being completely genuine in our request. Prayer changes us and unites us with our neighbor, particularly when we get out of our comfort zone and into recovery.

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- How do you practice the principle of seeking spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection?
- When have you overcome feelings of injustice to make amends or reconcile with someone?
- How have you grown in holiness—or the capacity to treat your neighbor with compassion—as a result of working a program of recovery?

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First Reading: Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Gospel: Matthew 5:38-48