

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time



The Big Book of *Alcoholics Anonymous* does not mince words regarding the importance of fellowship in recovery. From the opening of Chapter 2: There Is A Solution:

“We are people who normally would not mix. But there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful. We are like the passengers of a great liner the moment after rescue from shipwreck when camaraderie, joyousness and democracy pervade the vessel from steerage to Captain’s table. Unlike the feelings of the ship’s passengers, however, our joy in escape from disaster does not subside as we go our individual ways. The feeling of having shared a common peril is one element in the powerful cement which binds us. But that in itself would never have held us together as we are now joined.

The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution” (p. 17).

In recovery, we find common ground and reliance upon God and each other because of the spiritual near-death experiences we've had. Our greatest defense against addiction and compulsive behaviors is the act of reaching our hand out to newcomers and those still struggling. "It works when other activities fail" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 89).

Similarly, we enter the Church in need of salvation and take refuge in a common vessel. Our solution is found in the grace offered by Jesus Christ. We engage him through Sacred Scripture, the sacraments of the Church, and when we extend help to our fellow brothers and sisters in need. We gather today in the midst of God who grants us the gifts of faith, recovery, and life.

This Sunday’s Gospel Reading captures Jesus teaching his disciples about fraternal correction, of which we may have been on the receiving end prior to getting into the rooms of recovery. But first, Jesus reminds them (and us) of how far our Creator is willing to go in His pursuit of us (Mt. 18:12-14):

*If a man has a hundred sheep
and one of them goes astray,
will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills
and go in search of the stray?
And if he finds it, amen, I say to you,
he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that
did not stray.
In just the same way,
it is not the will of your heavenly Father
that one of these little ones be lost.*

Jesus then details specific actions to take in order to help a lost brother or sister:

*"If your brother sins against you,
go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.
If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.
If he does not listen,
take one or two others along with you,
so that 'every fact may be established
on the testimony of two or three witnesses.'
If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church.
If he refuses to listen even to the church,
then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax
collector.*

*Amen, I say to you,
whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in
heaven.*

*Again, amen, I say to you,
if two of you agree on earth
about anything for which they are to pray,
it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father.
For where two or three are gathered together in my
name,
there am I in the midst of them."*

Having been saved from great peril, let us not be ashamed to recall our dark past to empathize and accompany those on the margins. At the same time, we ought to be humble and willing enough to recognize that God is the only one capable of offering salvation. We could not manage our own lives and we certainly cannot manage the lives of others. However, God can, and will, if He is sought.

Reflection Questions

- Recall and share about your experience of being the one lost sheep who God went off to find.
- What benefits have you experienced as a result of supporting others in recovery?
- What lessons do you take away from Jesus' remarks about fraternal correction?

Become a Writing Contributor for CIR

Are you interested in sharing your testimony, writing daily reflections, or contributing to the CIR blog?

- **Make a difference** in the lives of others by sharing experience, strength, and hope in a written testimony, blog article, or other forms of written content
- **Never underestimate your ability to help the addict/alcoholic who still struggles** by letting others know it can be done and sharing key spiritual principles
- Find more information and submission instructions at catholicinrecovery.com/writing-for-cir

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-9

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Second Reading: Romans 13:8-10

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20