

Reflection Questions

- Of the Ninth Step Promises referenced in today's reflection, which seems most notable in your life today? Describe why.
- What stands in your way of seeing truth, honor, justice, purity, love, and grace around you?
- How do you practice gratitude?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16

Second Reading: Philippians 4:6-9

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time



As we journey through recovery and stack up days of sobriety, abstinence, clean time, balance, and/or freedom, we begin to notice a change in our response to life around us. Upon relating to a new group of individuals who have what we want, repeating new practices and spiritual tools, and re-framing our lives with hope, we might find that life is easier to cooperate with compared to the days of active addiction when our lives were unmanageable.

Participating in meetings and working through the Twelves Steps gives us the capacity to go one more day free from addiction and compulsive behaviors. In addition to this freedom, we are assured that progress will be made in other areas of life. Recovery literature describes a number of promises we'll find upon working the Ninth Step:

"If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 83-84).

These promises are consistent with last week's theme that our attitude and mindset are shaped by action. As people in recovery, the tangible encounters we've had with God's mercy can do miraculous things, even help us transition from hopeless to powerless to grateful.

Like the addict who has transformed her ways, Saint Paul details what he left behind in order to surrender to a new way of life in Christ. In the process, he was often reminded of his old behavior and tempted to let his dark past keep him down. Inspired by Jesus, he chooses hope and joy, which we find expressed in this Sunday's Second Reading.

*Brothers and sisters:
Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
make your requests known to God.
Then the peace of God that surpasses all
understanding
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Finally, brothers and sisters,
whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious,
if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.
Keep on doing what you have learned and received
and heard and seen in me.
Then the God of peace will be with you.*

Like the Ninth Step Promises, Paul describes how grace follows Christian action. When we remove the lens of addiction that views life through resentment, fear, and self-concern, we have a chance to see the masterpiece that God has been crafting for us and the whole world. It is no coincidence that the promises noted above come once we begin making amends with those we've hurt.

In our quest to know it all, we can be tempted to sacrifice faith. Similarly, our journey through recovery can be stunted when we focus too much on what is broken. "We missed the reality and the beauty of the forest because we were diverted by the ugliness of some of its trees" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 50). When we bring our requests to God and focus what we can do to bring good to the world, we are rewarded by peace, even if surrounded by chaos.