

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time



As we pray the first part of the Serenity Prayer, which we might turn to throughout our recovery, we ask God for the means to do His will through serenity, courage, and wisdom. Serenity is a gateway to acceptance. Courage yields change. The fruit of wisdom is the knowledge of good and evil, which was beyond our capacity when we were shackled by addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments. We hear more about the grace of wisdom to begin this Sunday's liturgy:

*Resplendent and unfading is wisdom,
and she is readily perceived by those who love her,
and found by those who seek her.
She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of
their desire;
Whoever watches for her at dawn shall not be
disappointed,
for he shall find her sitting by his gate.*

Working through the Twelve Steps allows us to see where patterns of fear and resentment have directed our thoughts, actions, and attitudes. This is not easy spiritual work as it requires us to be honest about things we may have avoided for a long time. But, until it's done, there will be little space for wisdom to dwell. The grace of courage can be especially helpful as we get to the root of our problem through the Twelve Steps and sacraments, recognizing that our various addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments are symptoms of a deeper condition.

When we slow down to ask God and our peers for help when facing a decision, a challenge, or an unhealthy desire, the options available to us become clearer. Growing in wisdom takes time, practice, and grace. At first, that grace comes externally through God and others. We often need to say the Serenity Prayer over-and-over in early recovery because we don't have the internal resources to discern the difference between what to accept and what to change.

Over time, however, "we will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us" (Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 84). This comes from consistently exercising new tools and patterns. As noted by the Wisdom author in this Sunday's First Reading, "taking thought of wisdom is the perfection of prudence." Prudence is one of four Cardinal Virtues, known to be "the charioteer of the virtues" as it governs all other virtues we possess. A combination of time, grace, practice, and progress allows us to make the subtle, yet significant, shift from self-reliance to trusting the Spirit of God within us.

Our desires point toward union with God. This Sunday's Responsorial Psalm declares "My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God." Because of sin and the allure of idols such as alcohol, drugs, food, lust, gambling, technology, and codependency, we seek God in the wrong places.

We like the effect produced by these substances and behaviors, so we keep going back to them. Slowly, other things, such as healthy relationships, become less of a priority. We need more to achieve our desired result. We rationalize the resulting consequences and often attempt to minimize them through dishonesty and control. God and others begin to appear less trustworthy. We isolate. Fear and resentment grow as our spirit crumbles. This is the death cycle of addiction.

No human power can relieve us of this condition. Addiction manifests biologically, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. Therefore, we need a holistic change of mind, body, and soul. The humility that comes from being powerless over addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments propels us to seek wisdom.

We learn to trust God and others to meet our needs rather than turning to unhealthy substances and behaviors. A psychic change comes about, usually before we're even aware of it. Healthy relationships become a top priority as we mature in wisdom and enjoy the fruits of acceptance, change, and knowledge of good and evil. This is the life cycle of recovery.

Reflection Questions

- How have you sought and found wisdom?
- How have you broken free from patterns of resentment and fear?
- What is going on in your life today that requires wisdom?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Wisdom 6:12-16

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13