

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Many spiritual principles at the heart of 12-step recovery and Catholic faith have a perplexing, contradictory nature to them on the surface. You may be puzzled hearing things like “surrender to win” and “the first shall be last and the last shall be first.” Distorted cultural conceptions of success—based on power, strength, and having everything figured out—can be barriers to encountering Jesus Christ and finding personal growth in recovery.

Most of us begin our recovery from addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments with shame, fear, and doubt. Over time, we realize that we are not alone and can begin to appreciate the new way of life sparked by our need for help and sustained by a sacramental approach to recovery. God has gotten our attention, and now we rely on Him to direct our attitudes and behaviors each day.

Saint Paul summarizes the humble, honest, and open attitude we ought to adopt in this Sunday’s Second Reading:

Brothers and sisters:

*That I, Paul, might not become too elated,
because of the abundance of the revelations,
a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of
Satan,
to beat me, to keep me from being too elated.
Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it
might leave me,
but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you,
for power is made perfect in weakness.”
I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses,
in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me.
Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults,
hardships, persecutions, and constraints,
for the sake of Christ;
for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Paul learned what we all can discover when we work (and live) Steps One, Two, and Three—we can’t, God can, we ought to let Him. Even upon finding freedom from our primary addiction, compulsion, or unhealthy attachment, we might see that there are other aspects of our lives that may prove to be a thorn in our side.

We need to relinquish expectations of perfection, seek spiritual progress, and be patient with ourselves as we relate our journey to that of Saint Paul. The grace of Christ is greater than any personal strength we might have. We should be more concerned with our commitment to doing the next right thing rather than being perceived as strong and having it all together.

Recovery literature sheds light on the fruits of withstanding trials and difficulties, even when done imperfectly, knowing that our power rests in God:

"All those who have persisted have found strength not ordinarily their own. They have found wisdom beyond their usual capability. And they have increasingly found a peace of mind which can stand firm in the face of difficult circumstances. We discover that we do receive guidance for our lives to just about the extent that we stop making demands upon God to give it to us on order and on our terms" (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 104).

Let us reflect on the expectations we hold for God, ourselves, and others as we gaze upon the journey ahead. Rather than leaning into our own insufficiencies, we move forward and rest on the grace and power of God, one day at a time.

Reflection Questions

- How has your experience with weakness and powerlessness made it possible to receive God's grace?
- Describe the strength, wisdom, and peace of mind that has come while persisting through recovery.
- What helps you accept life on God's terms rather than your own?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Exodus 2:2-5

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 123:1-2, 2, 3-4

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Gospel: Mark 6:1-6