

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time



One of the many gifts we find through our recovery is that of identity. We get a chance to learn who God is, who we are (His beloved children), and identify our cross—that thorn in our side which propels us to face resistance with courage. When recognized, our addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments can catapult us into an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ through the sacraments and Twelve Steps.

Unfortunately, the cunning, baffling, and powerful nature of addiction can prevent us from acknowledging that change needs to begin with us. Systems of denial keep us from taking responsibility for our actions or leave us believing things just aren't that bad. This is a difficulty for many people new to recovery, but can also reveal itself years into the process. As we stay committed to healthy daily habits and meetings, we get to see aspects of our own lives through the lens of others' honest shares and the gospel stories of Jesus.

In this Sunday's liturgy, we hear Jesus speak of the honest, open, and willing attitude necessary to follow him. The first half of the Gospel Reading reflects upon Peter wishing an easier, softer way for his Lord:

*[Jesus] began to teach them
that the Son of Man must suffer greatly
and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests,
and the scribes,
and be killed, and rise after three days.
He spoke this openly.
Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.
At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples,
rebuked Peter and said,
"Get behind me, Satan.
You are thinking not as God does,
but as human beings do."*

In addition to self-denial, we may also run up against others who plead for us to minimize the impact of our past behavior. This can be found on a cultural level as certain behaviors (marijuana and pornography use, for example) are becoming more-and-more socially acceptable regardless of their social, emotional, physical, and spiritual consequences. Additionally, sometimes family members and friends have a hard time understanding the great lengths we go to in order to find freedom from the addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments that have taken so much from us.

In this instance, Jesus did not allow the influence of Peter to direct his mission. He was steadfast in his efforts to give himself fully. When we walk the path of suffering love, as Jesus did, we are sure to meet resistance. Humans have a tendency to seek safety, comfort, and avoidance of pain. Peter wants to believe that the Christian life can be lived without the cross.

Jesus' response seems harsh, but is a request for Peter to follow Him. In reality, Jesus is laying out the cost of discipleship:

*He summoned the crowd with his disciples
and said to them,
"Whoever wishes to come after me
must deny himself,
take up his cross, and follow me.
For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for my sake
and that of the gospel will save it."*

We must freely walk the path of suffering love if we are to call ourselves followers of Christ. Lip service is cheap; our actions have value. The path of protection and safety has its own costs, specifically the compromise of our soul and the loss of the person who God wants us to become. When we lean into the spiritual work of recovery, we march together with Jesus toward Jerusalem. Along the way, we are sure to meet a few who will distract us as well as plenty of people who we can invite into the herd.

Reflection Questions

- What cross do you carry and how have you shared the weight of it with others?
- What is going on in your life that you are avoiding, denying, or failing to take responsibility for?
- How have you overcome resistance that you've experienced along your recovery journey?

September Webinar: What is Addiction? (and Other Topics) w/ Fr. Sean Kilcawley

A dialogue on Tuesday, September 17 at 8p ET/5p PT

- Join Fr. Sean and CIR's founder, Scott Weeman, for a passionate discussion integrating spiritual, practical, psychological, and theological perspectives
- You'll have a chance to ask questions you have on a wide range of topics related to addiction and recovery
- Free for CIR+ members otherwise \$10 to register
- For more info and to register for the webinar visit catholicinrecovery.com/event/webinar240917

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Isaiah 50:5-9a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 116:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

Second Reading: James 2:14-18

Gospel: Mark 8:27-35