

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Addiction robs us of more than any thief ever could. It strips us of our freedom and our care for things of God. It removes us from our families, loved ones, jobs, ambitions, dreams, and esteem. Addiction disrobes us of our human dignity, muddles the truth, and distorts the proper use of our will. It leaves us feeling naked, beaten up, and half-dead.

This Sunday's Gospel reading includes a story we have likely heard many times—that of the Good Samaritan. The passage begins as Jesus is being put to the test by a man looking for a loophole. He asked our Lord what he must do to inherit eternal life and is able to cite the religious law (Luke 10:27-28):

*"You shall love the Lord, your God,
with all your heart,
with all your being,
with all your strength,
and with all your mind,
and your neighbor as yourself."
[Jesus] replied to him, "You have answered
correctly;
do this and you will live."*

Then Jesus told a story to a scholar of the law illustrate what love of neighbor really looks like (Luke 10:30-37):

*"A man fell victim to robbers
as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho.
They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him
half-dead.
A priest happened to be going down that road,
but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite
side.
Likewise a Levite came to the place,
and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite
side.
But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him
was moved with compassion at the sight.
He approached the victim,
poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged
them.
Then he lifted him up on his own animal,
took him to an inn, and cared for him.
The next day he took out two silver coins
and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction,
'Take care of him.
If you spend more than what I have given you,
I shall repay you on my way back.'
Which of these three, in your opinion,
was neighbor to the robbers' victim?"
He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy."
Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

Like many biblical tales, we might try to identify with one of the characters in the plot. In this case, we may reflect on times when we were more like the priest or Levite who passed by the man in need as they crossed the street to avoid him. Perhaps we see ourselves in the caring role of the Samaritan. What about recognizing ourselves in the position of the beaten man?

The story of the Good Samaritan informs us about how addiction recovery works in a very sacramental way. We were helpless on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho (representing the path away from God and toward sin). The priest and Levite are on the same route, symbolizing religious views that had become too self-absorbed and unable to help.

The Samaritan traveler, however, was moved to pity at the sight of the beaten-up man. Early Church Fathers read this as a metaphor for the healing nature of God made flesh, noting that Samaritans were cultural outcasts and despised by many. It is significant that he approached the endangered man by pouring wine and oil over his wounds.

Jesus Christ approaches us in our brokenness and humiliation. Oil, which is used during baptism, confirmation, priestly ordination, and anointing of the sick, reaffirms our human dignity. The wine that is converted into His blood is poured into us to heal and transform us. The price He pays for our redemption is one that has not been earned, nor can it be fully repaid. As we reflect on the gift that is our recovery, we give thanks for the mercy with which we are treated so that we may go and do likewise for others.

- What have your addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments robbed you of?
- How were you cared for by others in recovery when you finally took the plunge to get help?
- How do you identify with the characters in the story of the helping Samaritan?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:10-14

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 37

Second Reading: Colossians 1:15-20

Gospel: Luke 10:25-37