

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time



Remaining on a path of recovery is not always easy. Our old patterns of coping came with real consequences, and, thanks to a series of spiritual experiences, we have been awakened to a new way of life. As we enter recovery, the circumstances around us do not necessarily change, but our ability to adapt to the world around us improves as we surrender our will and life over to the care of God.

We are being formed and strengthened by God. We are given a set of spiritual tools that prepare us to deal with whatever challenges may come while remaining sober, clean, abstinent, and free. However, there may be some growing pains. Without our various addictions, compulsions, or unhealthy attachments to turn to, we are forced to deal with fear, emotional unrest, and agitation head-on. The experience, strength, and hope from others who have endured the journey before us can be valuable to show us the way.

This Sunday's second reading speaks directly to the perceived pain of spiritual progress—a significant shift from our undisciplined ways of old (Hebrews 12:7-13):

*Endure your trials as “discipline”;
God treats you as sons.
For what “son” is there whom his father does not discipline?
At the time,
all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain,
yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.
So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.
Make straight paths for your feet,
that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed.*

Instead of blindly following every impulse and craving, we pause and invite God to guide our decision-making. This often means building the courage to see how our addictive attitudes and behaviors affect others. Pain comes from recognizing the truth that our actions impact those we care the most about. Fortunately, the Twelve Steps provide an avenue of healing for ourselves and others. Each step is critical to building our spiritual toolkit, beginning with assessing and acknowledging the natural consequences of our actions.

Natural consequences tend to be mistaken as a punishment from God. It is wise to recognize the difference. God does not enable behavior that separates us from Him by simply letting us off the hook. Instead, He gives us the opportunity to learn from the experience so that we may know peace.

Like a parent practicing tough love, God allows us to know the pain of our addictive behavior so that we may return to the love He freely offers. In the past, we have avoided knowing this pain by fleeing back to the source of our pain—a cycle that digs us further into the darkness of addictions, compulsions, and attachments. We reach rock bottom when we choose to stop digging our own hole and seek the light above.

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough,” Jesus says to a crowd in this Sunday’s Gospel reading.

This can be challenging to hear, although we prepare ourselves to enter the gate each time we work the Twelve Steps, reach out for support, pause and ask God for direction, choose to sit with uncomfortable emotions, spend time reading Scripture and recovery literature, or contact a new group member.

As a good father, God allows His children to experience discipline. It may take time to recognize discipline as beneficial. If we can find the humility to be strengthened and formed by it, God will convert our pain into freedom, joy, and purpose.

Reflection Questions

- How have you used addictive behaviors and attitudes to cope with challenging circumstances in your life? What were the natural consequences?
- What experience do you have with discipline, and how have you learned to respond to it?
- What is one step you can take this week to choose the narrow gate instead of old coping patterns?

The Value of Service in Recovery

A webinar exploring the service imperative in which we are called to participate in our recovery and faith

- Webinar on **Wednesday, August 27 at 7p ET/4p PT**
- Gain a deeper understanding of why service is vital to sustain recovery, insight into the Catholic call to serve, tools for discerning and using your God-given gifts, practical ideas for service roles, and how to start a meeting
- Free for CIR+ members otherwise \$10 to register
- This and all webinar recordings available on CIR+
- Register at **www.catholicinrecovery.com/webinars**

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Isaiah 66:18-21

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 117:1, 2

Second Reading: Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

Gospel: Luke 13:22-30