

Reflection Questions

- What was your understanding of God before you started the process of addiction recovery?
 - How has this changed?
- When you pray, do you find yourself asking God to bend His will toward yours or do you ask Him to bend your will toward His?
- Of the four things that Thomas Aquinas says we seek as a substitute for God (pleasure, power, honor, and wealth), which have you been tempted to pursue amidst your recovery efforts?
- What step are you on?

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Some of us enter recovery with a distorted understanding of who God is. After admitting powerlessness over lust and acknowledging the unmanageability of our lives as a result, we are asked to come to believe that God can restore us to sanity in step two. For those of us that see God as punitive and authoritarian, this can be troublesome.

This week's second reading, taken again from the Letter to the Hebrews, re-frames our understanding of Jesus Christ as someone who knows our path and our pain:

*Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus, the Son of God,
let us hold fast to our confession.
For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,
but one who has similarly been tested in every way,
yet without sin.
So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to
receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.*

We get the benefit of encountering others in our fellowship that can sympathize with our weakness and have been tested in similar ways. We can share openly and honestly about the spiritual journey we are on through our recovery. Our time together produces unity, companionship, and guidance. Together, we look to Christ for direction and confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace for timely help.

Feelings of shame and unworthiness can be a barrier to this step and the spiritual progress we make in recovery. Stuck in our black-and-white thinking, we may expect that if we put in the time and energy that we will get a certain result (healed relationships, more time available to us, self-esteem, or renewed honor in the workplace or in our families). These results will come, but only if we look beyond them and keep our gaze fixed on Christ.

We hear from the 10th chapter of Mark's gospel this week as the disciples are getting a little bit ahead of themselves:

*James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him,
"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."
He replied, "What do you wish me to do for you?"
They answered him, "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left."*

We have heard a similar tone from the disciples over the past several weeks while reading through Mark's gospel. Previously, the disciples asked who among them would be the greatest after Christ's death. Again, they are asking for power and honor, which, along with pleasure and wealth, are the four things Saint Thomas Aquinas claims we substitute for God.

There can be a temptation to give up a pleasure-providing addiction while substituting it with the pursuit of wealth, honor, or power. Not having an addiction or unhealthy compulsion holding us down, we are capable of doing more. The act of getting back some of what we lost can be confused for spiritual development. Therefore, it is critical that we engage in the practice of regularly evaluating our spiritual condition. This requires some time and effort and should include a balanced assessment of our strengths and opportunities for growth.

Upon forming a personal relationship with Jesus through the first few steps, we take action through the spiritual inventory of step four. This is vital to our development and creates a new framework for seeing the world through pure lenses. When we put our strengths, sins, resentments, and fears into our fourth step inventory, we are tangibly expressing our faith in God, knowing that our Lord is able to sympathize with our weaknesses and restore us to new life in Him.