

## **Ministry, Sacrament and Alcoholism**

**Fr. Joseph “Joe” T.**

### **Editors’ Note:**

**At the 2007 Guest House Institute Summer Leadership Conference in Minneapolis, MN Father Joseph T. , a respected administrator in his religious order of priests & brothers, gave the following talk.**

**It relates some of his own experience with addiction as well as the wisdom he has garnered from working with other addicted priests and religious. He is a past alumnus of Guest House.**

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### Some initial premises

Hugh Kerr has observed that all wisdom is plagiarism; only stupidity is original. According to those principles, the originality of this presentation might be all too evident. I would like to acknowledge from the very beginning, however, that whatever wisdom might be gleaned in the next hour or so can be credited to others, especially my friends in the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

What I intend to offer does not presume to be a rigorously scientific presentation. Essentially, this is a reflection by an alcoholic who, by God’s grace and the principles of AA, has not had to take a drink for nearly twenty years, as well as the thoughts of a man who happens to be in his thirty-fourth year of religious life and has recently completed twenty-nine years as a priest. My own familiarity with active alcoholism and recovery is a primary source for this paper.

A second source of material is the experience of twenty-two years in the direction of my Congregation: six at the provincial level and now nearly sixteen as part of the international leadership of a Congregation of 5,500 priests and brothers, working in seventy-six countries of the world. These years have given me some idea of the struggles of priests as well as the efforts of their superiors to help them.

Before getting to the heart of the matter – “hiking the ball,” as one of our professors used to encourage his faint-hearted students – I must also admit to a real prejudice that will condition my presentation. I refer to the high value that I assign to the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, which I see as the most appropriate and efficient path of recovery for an alcoholic priest or religious. While AA never claims to be the sole path for the healing and rehabilitation of an alcoholic, I find it difficult to understand how people can make it to full sobriety on their own without the benefit of the principles and the support of a group that helps them to grow spiritually. In dealing with our personal or vocational issues beyond addiction, many alcoholics do benefit from counseling and

spiritual direction but, in my experience, the daily effort to “practice the principles of AA in all my affairs”<sup>1</sup> has allowed me, one day at a time, not only to leave behind the hell of active alcoholism but also to enjoy nearly two decades of increasingly happy and productive sobriety.

The organizers of this conference asked me to look at a question as the basis for this presentation: *How does alcoholism impact priestly life, ministry, community life and the efficacy of pastoral care?* In approaching the question, two standpoints occur to me. First, I would like to speak about the occupational hazards of priests, that is, to reflect with you on some of the professional circumstances and personal characteristics of priests and male religious<sup>2</sup> that might ease the slide into addiction and, almost certainly, serve to cement a shield of denial that, if left intact, will hasten his descent towards incapacitation, insanity or premature death.

The second portion of this presentation hopes to offer reasons why superiors and confreres should intervene in the hope of restoring a sick brother to sanity and why a life-giving project like Guest House deserves our support. There is the imperative of Christian love, of course, but I also intend to show you that the provision of a solid, holistic program like that of Guest House can offer the Church, her dioceses and religious families, a lot of bang for the buck.

### **Occupational hazards of priests and religious**

I believe that there are particular circumstances in the life of a priest or male religious that can hasten his descent into active alcoholism, especially by providing a rationale that will sustain his increasing abuse of alcohol while protecting him from honestly accepting the extent to which his life has left the rails. What is more, his training

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Twelve Step: “Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs”, in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, fourth edition (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2001), p. 60; henceforward references to the fourth edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* will employ its popular title, the *Big Book*.

<sup>2</sup> My experience of alcoholic religious has been almost exclusively that of men, hence the references in this talk are provided by priests and Brothers.

may strengthen this denial and impede his entrance into a therapeutic program or AA. Ignorance of such pernicious building blocks in the wall of denial will serve to accelerate his increasing incapacitation, leading to permanent disability and premature death.

It is important, however, to emphasize that alcoholics who happen to be priests or religious are not an entirely unique species among those who suffer from this chronic, progressive and potentially fatal disease. The wisdom of AA counsels against any alcoholic seeing himself as “terminally unique.” The language of the Twelve Steps employs the first person-plural form of the verb, testifying to the fact that alcoholics face a “common peril” and have discovered a “common solution.”<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the initial inspiration of Austin Ripley acknowledged that the special nature of the religious life for priests, brothers, deacons and seminarians requires special, personalized attention which honors not only their human dignity but their calling and commitment as well<sup>4</sup>. Those of you who are familiar with the history of Guest House will recall that its founder was motivated by his strong Catholic faith as well as personal gratitude for his own reprieve from the insanity of active alcoholism. In the late 1940’s and early 1950’s “Rip” noted with concern the apparent failure of AA to reach and hold alcoholic priests. Recognizing this particular need, he set in motion an institution that has contributed to the lasting sobriety of the vast majority of 6,000 priests and religious that have been guests at Lake Orion or Rochester since 1956.<sup>5</sup>

### **What can grease the skids?**

What are some features of the clerical culture that might make it easier for a priest or religious, who is predisposed to addictive behavior, to toboggan down the slippery slope of active alcoholism? Two manifestations are worthy of mention. The first is the central role that alcohol has played in the lives of priests and religious in many parts of the world. Preprandial happy hours and late-night drinking sessions formed part of the

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<sup>3</sup> *Big Book*, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.guesthouse.org/03-01.php> .

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.guesthouse.org/02-01.php>

daily routine of the first communities in which I lived. An obligatory happy hour was an important feature of most clerical gatherings. Of course, the vast majority of clerics do not find that easy access and frequent exposure to alcohol poses any problem for them. For some of us, however, the availability of booze, together with a tacit blessing to imbibe daily, proved to be, at the beginning, a well-deserved reward, then a daily requirement and finally, a deadly obsession.

Although I have lived outside the country for most of the last seventeen years, I have the impression that today alcohol is less central to the culture of priests and religious in the United States. Parties, provincial chapters, assemblies and other gatherings of clerics and religious no longer appear to be occasions for heavy drinking, an observation which leads me to ask: “Is it possible that Guest House has successfully corralled the last of us drunks?” However, there is another characteristic of clerical culture that I believe still provides a matrix in which all sorts of unhealthy behavior may flourish. I refer to the anonymity of priestly and religious life, built on an ethic of politeness that allows pathological manifestations to progress relatively unchecked. By the time a competent authority becomes aware of the severity of the problem, the afflicted person is already in the grip of full-blown alcoholism or other types of addiction.

Two hundred and forty years ago, Voltaire, the French essayist and a savage critic of priestly and religious life, observed that monks were “men who bunch together without knowing each other, live together without loving each other, and die together without mourning each other.”<sup>6</sup> Certainly not every religious community or diocesan presbyterate can be so roundly caricatured. Nevertheless, the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church recognizes that superficial communication and a faceless lifestyle can still be a problem for priests and religious.”<sup>7</sup> A remark made to me by a friend and fellow patient at Guest

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<sup>6</sup> *L’Homme aux Quarante Écus* (1768), VIII : « C’est une maxime assez connue que les moines sont des gens qui s’assemblent sans se connaître, vivent sans s’aimer, et meurent sans se regretter ».

<sup>7</sup> “The lack of or weakness in communication usually leads to weakening of fraternity: if we know little or nothing about the lives of our brothers or sisters, they will be strangers to us, and the relationship will become anonymous, as well as create true and very real problems of isolation and solitude”; Congregation

House may help illustrate the problem. One morning, as we left a session of group therapy, John C. turned to me and said

“Joe, all this business about sharing really frustrates me! I don’t know how to do it. Years ago, when I got to my first assignment after ordination, an old confrere pulled me aside and offered this advice: ‘In this house, don’t tell nobody nothing, unless the guy is wearing a stole!’ ”

Father John was gifted enough to be appointed a university president but, outside of the sacrament of reconciliation, was reluctant to speak in community about anything of a personal nature. Our friendship revealed that he was not reticent by nature but had learned such caution as a requirement for community life.

An anonymous community life, founded upon superficial and deficient communication, can exacerbate an occupational hazard of priests and religious: what Pope John Paul II termed the sort of “loneliness, which is the product of various difficulties and which in turn creates further difficulties”.<sup>8</sup> The traditional reluctance of communities of men to speak openly about their problems can pursue a confrere even after his death. The province in which I spent the first two decades of my religious life, has the lovely custom of reading at Morning Prayer in each of the houses a brief biography of a confrere who died on that day. As a young priest, I was struck by the accounts of gifted men, some of whom I knew personally, who died after a long and futile struggle with alcoholism. In their biographies, the cause of death was never mentioned, unlike the case of others, who had waged a heroic fight before succumbing to a more acceptable malady, like cancer or heart disease.

That last point leads me to the question of denial.

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for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternal Life in Community: “Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor”*, (2 February 1994), 32.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (29 March 1992), 74.

### **Denial is not just a river in Egypt**

A great friend of Guest House, Dr. Ernie Kurtz, tells of a moment of illumination that came one day during a visit to the Lake Orion facility:

Shortly after my arrival, the House Director came down to my office and with a twinkle in his eye asked in his resonant Irish tenor: “Ah, Dr. Kurtz, would you like to have a reputation as being wondrously wise?”

“Of course,” I answered, smiling back at the ruddy-faced Celt, “anyone would want such a reputation. Tell me, Ed, how?”

“Well,” our resident genius replied, “as you may suspect, not all of our men make it on the first try. Some of them try a wee sip of the ‘creature’ again, and so eventually they end up back here. And because I am the Director they come to me to be interviewed as they are re-admitted, and when they do, I start off by asking them two questions, and oh, they think I am so wise...that I can see into their very souls.”

After a maddeningly long pause, Ed continued: “The first question I ask, of course, is, ‘When did you stop going to meetings?’ And the second question I ask them is, ‘And what are you hiding?’ ”<sup>9</sup>

Denial is not simply hiding things from others; more insidious, even, is the attempt to deceive oneself. Denial is so characteristic a feature of the disease that it is said that alcoholism is the only disease that tries to convince you that you don't have it. An adage from the popular wisdom of AA observes: “I wasn't an alcoholic until I stopped drinking.”

Like other alcoholics, a priest or religious who suffers from this disease must construct and maintain a system of denial that will permit him to continue drinking by shielding him from the reality of his deteriorating life. As men, an important thread in the web of denial is the perception that we are still performing our duties and even working harder than our peers. I recall a conversation with a chancellor from a Canadian diocese, who was finishing his treatment when I arrived at Lake Orion in October 1987. The monsignor related how he used to scowl disapprovingly as the other priests of the

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<sup>9</sup> Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Journey to Wholeness*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 149.

chancery took off on Wednesday afternoons to play golf, thinking to himself: “I’ll show those lazy bastards – I work!” Sometime during his stay at Guest House a new thought occurred to him: those fellows are still playing golf on Wednesday afternoons and here I am in a treatment facility. Who showed what to whom?

I came to learn a similarly humiliating truth. One day in group therapy we were asked to talk about our work. Trolling for sympathy from the others, I complained how, as the pastor of a sprawling inner city parish, I never came off duty. The phone rang day and night; it usually was for me and rarely was the caller interested in whether or not I was having a nice day. Instead of sympathy, I earned a question from the counselor: “Father T., have you ever thought that you worked the way you did, so that you could drink the way you wanted?” Of course, what I had been telling myself was that I was zealously spending my life in service of others but that claim had become largely a defense against recognizing my increasing obsession with alcohol.

Our work, the misunderstanding of family and colleagues, loneliness, guilt, anger, frustration – all these can and do provide the raw materials for constructing and reinforcing denial. I can appreciate the lament of the Irishman: “Everyone complains about my drinking but nobody asks me about my thirst.” Denial spins the reasons to justify slaking that thirst with a substance that is destroying us. In my experience, if one presses a priest or religious to explain why he is abusing alcohol, the response is fundamentally: “If you had my life, you’d drink too!”

The grace of God and the love of our brothers and sisters can pierce the web of denial. A crisis can lead us to see what we have become as well as our own powerlessness to extricate ourselves from the mess. So we try to leave behind de-Nile and search for another river.

**Are not the rivers of Damascus... better than all the waters of Israel? (2 Kings 5, 12)**

The Second Book of Kings relates the healing of a man who was stricken with an incurable disease. Although successful in his chosen profession, all his accomplishments meant little in the face of the disfigurement caused by his relentless sickness, which

threatened finally to separate him from family and society. The man's name was Naaman, a Syrian general, renowned for his courage. He was also a leper.

At the urging of a young captive, Naaman decides to visit the prophet Elisha and arrives at the door of the holy man in a splash of military might with gifts to curry his favor. The prophet does not come out to meet the distinguished visitor; instead, he sends a message to Naaman: "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will heal, and you will be clean" (2 Kings 5, 10). Naaman angrily rejects such a mundane solution, protesting "I thought that he would surely come out and stand there to invoke the LORD his God, and would move his hand over the spot, and thus cure the leprosy." Besides, sneers the general, our streams back home are better than any old Jordan River! You remember how the story ends: his servants persuade the general to keep it simple and follow the suggestion. The result? "His flesh became again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean" (v. 15). And Naaman the Syrian came to believe.

A good number of alcoholic priests and religious have a hard time sticking with A.A. Some are fearful or ashamed to be recognized by parishioners or others at a meeting. I have found this attitude especially prevalent in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Others are blocked by a sort of clericalism and "spiritual superiority." Like Naaman invoking the merits of the rivers of Damascus, these brothers find it difficult to adhere to AA because of its apparent simplicity. They protest that their own spiritual regimen is enough. After listening to such objections, I sometimes quote the wisdom of Mother Annabel, a wizened African-American matriarch who used to open an AA meeting every Sunday night in a storefront church in the inner city of Pontiac, Michigan. Mother Annabel would smile sweetly at the assembly and announce: "My name is Annabel and I am an alcoholic. On Sunday mornings, I goes to church to save my soul; on Sunday evenings, I comes to A.A. to save my derrière." Actually, not known to speak French, Mother Annabel would use a shorter word to describe the object of salvation.

The crisis, subsequent surrender and healing journey that mark the passage of a priest or religious from active alcoholism to recovery may help him overcome the most treacherous hazard of the clerical caste. I refer, of course, to the study of theology. The

danger faced by many priests and religious – and not simply those who are alcoholic – is that their intense academic formation risks reducing God to an object of study. If one is not aware of this hazard, theology is no longer, in the classic definition of St. Anselm, “faith seeking understanding”, but rather a sort of divine “Trivial Pursuit”, that is, knowing a great deal about God, but not knowing God.

I wonder if this occupational hazard is not experienced more painfully by priests and religious in the throes of active alcoholism. God is a person, not an object, and, as such, seeks to meet us in a personal manner. A disease which wreaks such havoc on personal relationships cannot help but distort the spiritual life of an alcoholic, a dimension that might already be weakened by the prior transformation of the Other into an object of study. What is worse, denial, a typical feature of alcoholism, has also transformed the alcoholic into something else: a man behind the mask. Orual, the heroine of a wonderful novel by C. S. Lewis, captures the dilemma when she asks: “How can the gods meet us face to face till we have faces?”<sup>10</sup>

**Perks: it is good to be a priest...**

It must be said that there are real advantages to being a priest or religious, if one is locked in combat with addiction. Let me cite two. First, I presume that most of us are attracted to this way of life by certain ideals as well as by a spiritual hunger – or thirst; it is not accidental that booze is also called “spirits!”<sup>11</sup> Granted, the disease can befuddle belief and the many compromises brought about by alcoholic behavior can badly tarnish ideals. But, the grace of recovery does not transport you to an alien nirvana; rather, sobriety holds the promise of allowing you to realize your deepest ideals, the dreams through which God first spoke in the depths of our hearts. Sobriety is like coming home.

Another plus for a priest as he confronts the truth of his alcoholism is that the leadership of dioceses and religious congregations, by and large, is enlightened and

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<sup>10</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956).

<sup>11</sup> Carl Jug once noted in a letter to Bill W., a co-founder of AA, that alcoholics in seeking *spiritus frumenti* were actually seeking *spiritus Dei*; the letter was reprinted in the January 1963 issue of *Grapevine*.

compassionate and will offer him generous support and understanding. I must say, however, that this is not the case in every national or local Church. There are cultures in which alcoholism is still seen exclusively as a moral failing and I have visited communities in my own religious family where a suffering confrere is deliberately isolated or punished with useless sanctions. And, even when a superior in Eastern Europe, Africa or Asia earnestly wants to help an addicted confrere, he does always know what to do or where to turn. We ought to applaud the outreach that Guest House has realized outside of North America and beyond Euro-American culture, such as the visit by Michael Morton<sup>12</sup> last year to Croatia as well as the initiatives among Hispanic clergy and religious in the United States. We must also be grateful for members of AA across the world who seek to “carry the message,” even to suffering priests and brothers.

### **What’s the return on the investment”?**

The final part of my presentation may be preaching to the choir. I presume that you are participating in this conference because you have seen how addiction ravages the individual, his community and the people he wants to serve. You strive to understand better the soul-searing effects of alcoholism and appreciate the incredible liberation of an addict in recovery. With regard to that last point, the addict in recovery, let me briefly reflect with you on a few questions. First, why bother? Then, what can be expected from a priest or religious in recovery? Put another way, what’s the return on the investment?

### **Why bother?**

It is enlightening to note that each of the three world religions commonly referred to as “religions of the book” assign far-reaching consequences to the act of saving the life of single person. Judaism teaches that he who saves the life of another has saved the entire world,<sup>13</sup> while Islam characterizes the rescue of another as “saving the life of the

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Morton, M.A. LMFT is the Executive Director of Guest House Institute.

<sup>13</sup> “...and he who saves the life of one person, of him it is as if he had saved an entire world” (B. Talmud Sanhedrin 37a).

whole people.”<sup>14</sup> Christianity teaches an even more radical imperative. In Jesus, God identifies himself with those to whom service is given or refused, and our behavior toward others is our behavior toward God. “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25, 40).

An intervention done in love and the on-going support of a brother in recovery is not simply visiting the imprisoned but preparing the visit of the Lord, who comes to set captives free (Ps 146, 7; Lk 4, 18). In the secular language of AA, preparing the way of the Lord is called “carrying the message.”<sup>15</sup> But, as alcoholics tell each other: carry the message but recognize one’s limitations; you can carry the message, but not the alcoholic. This affirmation is more than simply balm to salve the conscience of a bishop or religious superior, who has patiently made multiple interventions in the life of a sick priest or brother, only to be frustrated by his manipulation or stubborn refusal to see what is evident to everyone else.

The love of Christ urges us to do something but we cannot control the results.

My first sponsor in AA, a wonderful Jesuit by the name of Joe H., told me about a conversation he had with his first sponsor. Joe, by the way, was a brilliant professor of higher mathematics and highly skilled in information technology. His sponsor, on the other hand, was a good ol’ boy from West Virginia, who probably had never finished grade school. Yet when they first met, the good ol’ boy was doing something that seemed absolutely impossible to the professor: he was staying sober, one day at a time.

The gentleman from Appalachia decided to be straight with Joe from the very start. He said, “Boy, I want you to know that, of the first eleven fellows I sponsored, six of them killed themselves. Sometimes, after not hearing from one or the other, I went over his place and found him,

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<sup>14</sup> “We ordained for the children of Israel That if anyone slew a person — unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land —it would be as if he slew the whole people; And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people” (Q’uran Surah 5:35).

<sup>15</sup> Step 12: “Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs” [emphasis mine]; cf. *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc, 1952), 113ff.

dangling from a pipe or with his brains splattered on the wall.” Joe, wondering if he hadn’t made a major mistake in his choice of sponsor, gulped and asked “Then, why do you keep sponsoring people?”

The sponsor was adamant: “Because I have to carry the message. What they do with it – what you do with it – is up to you and up to God.”

Why bother? Because we must carry the message – we, who are grateful drunks who don’t have to drink today and we who believe that the concern we show towards others, especially those who are the “least,” is, finally, concern for the suffering face of God.

The lifestyle and quality of ministry of an alcoholic priest or religious can be a boon to his diocese or congregation. Once again, I do not believe that it is enough for us to be simply dry but progressing in the sober life; hence the strong recommendation for ongoing and active participation in the Fellowship of AA.

**“I know that my Redeemer liveth”**

A terrifying revelation for many newly sober alcoholics is the insistence of AA on the necessity of a “spiritual experience” or “spiritual awakening” as an absolute condition for lasting recovery. For not a few, the idea of depending on God for anything is a dubious if not an entirely offensive proposition. The claim of the spiritual basis of recovery was so easily misunderstood that, following the publication of the first edition of the so-called “Big Book” of AA, the authors felt the need to include a special appendix on the nature of a spiritual experience<sup>16</sup>.

Newly sober priests and religious might not share the same antipathy to the mention of a Higher Power. But, there is a reasonable chance that many will arrive with their own objections, either because they are awash in guilt and shame or because God has been little more than a distant and unfriendly concept. Such dispositions will pass as the individual comes to believe that, far from being his personal triumph, sobriety is actually a gift. He will sense that the God he read about or prayed to, is actually doing for

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<sup>16</sup> *Big Book*, Fourth Edition, 567-568.

him what he could not do for himself.<sup>17</sup> In the deliverance from the agonizing chaos of active alcoholism the Spirit offers the individual an experience of God. It is an indescribable and inexplicable feeling of inner security which one can only experience but, once it is experienced, one can never forget it. The sober priest and religious “knows that his Redeemer liveth” (Job 19, 25).

### **A conversion that makes spirituality accessible**

The principles of A.A., far from providing a private path that leads a priest or brother into an esoteric cult, actually serve as an entrée to or catalyst for growth in the spiritual patrimony of his congregation or in the sacrament of Orders. As they work the Twelve Steps, Jesuits have little difficulty in recognizing the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. A Redemptorist will gain new insight into the fundamental role that St. Alphonsus assigns to conformity with the will of God.<sup>18</sup> This access to spirituality is not built on a theoretical understanding of rules but rather an eagerness to continue to grow spiritually as well as the confidence that such growth is really possible. At the heart of this confidence is the seminal experience of release from addiction, which is appreciated finally as an experience of the saving power of God. With St. Paul, the recovering priest or religious may well ask

“What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?” (Rm 8, 31-32)

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<sup>17</sup> One of the “promises” of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous is “We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves”; cf. *Big Book*, 84.

<sup>18</sup> A succinct statement of this cornerstone of Redemptorist spirituality can be found in the opening lines of *Uniformità alla Volontà di Dio (Conformity to the Will of God)*, published by Alphonsus in 1755: “Our whole perfection consists in loving God who is so deserving of our love...The perfection of the love of God consists in uniting our will with this most holy will...”.

This experience of God in sobriety leads the individual to a greater selflessness<sup>19</sup> and gratitude. The experience also engenders humility, which allows one to walk a realistic course between beast and angel by recognizing clearly what and who we really are, followed by a sincere attempt to become what we could be.<sup>20</sup> And, finally, this experience of God as the author and guarantor of one's sobriety usually produces a greater tolerance of others, which can be an invaluable means for discovering community.<sup>21</sup>

### **A Eucharistic life**

For nearly sixteen years my mailing address has been Roma and, when not visiting the confreres in other countries, I try to make time to explore the wonders of the Eternal City. When asked about my favorite places, I recommend highly a visit to any of the catacombs. In these subterranean labyrinths one can glimpse the symbols and art of our mothers and fathers in faith.

Christ is placed as the predominant character. What the Sacred Heart is for Catholics to-day, namely the symbol of Christ's love, the Good Shepherd was for these ancient Christians. The Savior is often represented at work among us: on the bas-reliefs or on the walls we see Jesus who touches the eyes of the blind-man or raises Lazarus from the tomb; Jesus who multiplies the bread or changes water into wine: it is always the same Christ who goes about doing good.

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<sup>19</sup> William James described the dependence upon God as producing “jubilation...an expansive affection, and all expansive affections are self-forgetful and kindly so long as they endure;” cf. *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Random House, 1999), 421.

<sup>20</sup> *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc, 1952), 58.

<sup>21</sup> Tolerance of others may eventually give way to recognizing in the story of others, one's own story. A.A. never tires of inviting its members to “identify, not compare.” The theologian Mary Daly observes: “the deepest possible community [is] the community that is discovered rather than ‘formed,’ when we meet others who are on the same voyage”; *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985 [1973]) 159, cited in Kurtz and Ketcham, *op. cit.*, 240.

Then there are the symbols. The most significant ones are those in which Christ does not appear in human form, but under the veil of a symbol, such as the fish and later, the chi-rho. If you are an attentive visitor, you will note the absence of our most familiar Christian symbol. In the oldest sections of the catacombs, you will see no clear representation of the Cross. Before Constantine, when the cross was daily used as the gallows for slaves and foreigners, the Christian disguised the repulsive aspect through the symbols, such as the anchor.

What changed in order to introduce the Cross into Christian art and iconography? The disappearance of public crucifixion certainly made the symbol more palatable to Christians. But I wonder if the lived experience of life in the Spirit did not make Christians more open to embracing the scandal of the Cross, “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1, 22-24). The Cross demonstrates the power of God to bring life out of appalling suffering and apparent defeat. The Cross reminds us that “all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rm 8, 28).

Guest House has its own iconography, which includes representations of the archangel Raphael as well as a curious logo that dates to the first years of the Lake Orion facility. You have seen the symbol on the stationery and newsletters: an ensemble that, depending on the point of view, suggests either two hands supporting a head bowed in despair or the same hands raising a cup of thanksgiving. I believe that symbol captures very well the reality of Guest House and, like the Cross, reminds one of the loving power of a saving God. This is the mystery that is celebrated in the holy Eucharist and it is fitting that a graduate of Guest House closes this reflection with the imagery of the raised cup and the grateful words of the psalm, since the grace of God experienced at Lake Orion so many years ago, has made it possible for me to continue to celebrate the Eucharist and progress in a Eucharistic way of life:

How can I repay the LORD for all the good done for me? I will raise the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. (Ps 116, 12-14).