

Catholic Men's Fellowship Cincinnati

“Why Men Get Together”

Many of the men that attend regular meetings of parish fellowship meeting have had an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ at some point in their lives. That encounter, as it has been told in thousands of meetings, is as varied and diverse as life itself. For many it marked a milestone event - a significant moment in which the man giving witness came to know the reality of the living Christ as he has never before experienced. For some the encounter was the defining moment – a moment of pure grace that made faith in Jesus Christ a compelling belief. For others the encounter with Jesus was a gradual commitment, a combination of many moments of grace that joined to make an undeniable mosaic of God's goodness.

Given the breadth of reasons as to why men attend a fellowship meeting, it is not easy to distill its components down to one universal explanation. I have attended thousands of men's meetings in the fellowship format for the past 23 years and have heard many testimonies and stories and I have often wondered what is the basic motivation for the success of the fellowship movement. **I am convinced that it resides in the acceptance of our utter dependence on the grace of God that we have learned through bottom-up experience.** Most of us became acquainted with Jesus Christ and the Church he founded through top down teaching and education growing up in Catholic environs. However, many of us did not have that personal encounter with the Lord until later in life through an event that jolted us out of our complacency.

We come together in fellowship because we know from the school of hard knocks that we have at best a very limited control of our existence. Many men come to fellowship meetings because of a reversal of fortune, or perhaps better put, as a result of recognizing that the false gods of power, influence and money had finally let them down. A false god is any misplaced desire for happiness that has substituted for hope in Jesus Christ. It is great blessing, though generally not immediately recognized as such, to have these false gods come crashing down. It is a confrontation with reality that sets us up for a future grounded in the saving grace of the Lord and one of renewed hope and vitality. “I have come so that you may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Men return to fellowship meetings because they are reminded that they depend utterly on the grace of God and to be become aware of any creeping encroachment of new false gods.

We know too from experience that we share a common flawed nature that has stubbornly resisted our best efforts at reform. We have come to realize that good intentions and New Year resolutions to overcome our wayward conduct are not good enough – that there is a malevolent force that prevents us from doing the good. It is an evil force that seemingly compels us to do the wrong even against our best efforts and desires to do the right thing. This is known as the divided will.

St. Paul describes this part of our nature in his Letter to the Romans in Chapter 7 “For what I am doing I do not understand, for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but am doing the very thing I hate” (verse 15) and “For the good that I want, I do not do, but

I practice the very evil that I do not want” (verse 19). Here is the great St. Paul describing how his self-discipline and will power are overwhelmed by the power of evil. In the end he relies utterly on the saving grace of the Cross and nothing else. “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks to God through Jesus Christ Our Lord! (verse 24 and 25). We too have come to know that the only antidote to the divided will is to surrender to the will of God.

If resolving and correcting our selfish and sometimes very destructive conduct was amenable to correction by educational programs or behavior modifying drugs, the solution to obsessive, addictive habits would have been found long ago. Some of these measures are no doubt valuable and important aids in improving habits and conduct but as Alcoholics Anonymous has proven, without much contradiction, the ultimate solution is by surrendering to the Higher Power, which for all Christians is Jesus Christ.

Alcoholic addictive men who are able to make that leap of faith know they are unable to stay sober by their own efforts and the best efforts of corrective regimes of all sorts.

They know that to resist the overwhelming compulsion to alcohol and remain sober they need the grace of the Higher Power and the fellowship of men who share the same condition.

Similarly, the men who come to fellowship meetings know that they share a common propensity to concupiscence that cannot be overcome without the grace of Jesus Christ and the help of other men. Men come to fellowship meetings because they realize that it

is difficult to overcome habitual sinfulness without the brotherhood of men who share the same flawed condition. They have come to know that without the constant support and encouragement of other men sharing the same convictions they will lose momentum and eventually revert to the pre-existing condition of distance from Jesus Christ. Without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and active communion with other men we will not stay “sober”.

Declan O’Sullivan, August, 2008