



# CHURCH OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA

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March 4, 2007  
Second Sunday in Lent

## SAVING MYSELF

One of the most successful life-giving, healing programs of our time is Alcoholics Anonymous. As you probably know, it has a twelve step program that has been adapted to treat many kinds of addictions and obsessions. The first step in any of these programs is to admit that you have a problem bigger than you are, and that you cannot control it. The second step is to believe that God can bring you to a peace and wholeness you don't have now. (The ones who aren't so sure about God speak instead of their "higher power"). Both steps are necessary for deep healing. That second step - involving the movement of the human heart to dependence on God - is, of course, a basic teaching of Jesus in the Gospels.

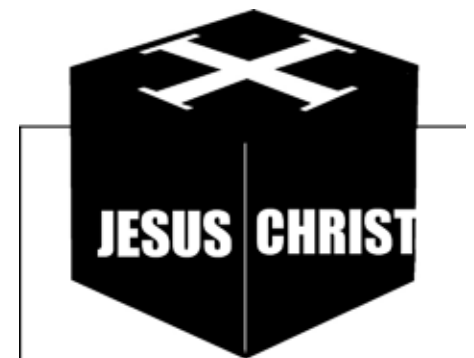


Jesus ran up against a lot of opposition to that message, though. The typical Jewish mentality of his time was that you could save yourself, really. What you needed to do was to carefully observe the laws and regulations found in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures. There were over six hundred of them - dealing with every facet of life. This became a heavy backpack to shoulder in the journey through life. Yet careful attention to this package of rules was considered the one sure way to wholeness and redemption.

This was the religious mentality of the scribes and pharisees, and Jesus was frequently in sharp conflict with them. I hope we realize this religious mentality is still very much alive and with us today! In this way of thinking, religion becomes a matter of : *I must do this. I must do that. I must avoid this. I must avoid that.* Notice the word "I" in all this. It's all very self-centered, isn't it! And as long as I'm focused on myself, it's easy to slip into deep discouragement when I fail to improve! What is happening, of course, is that I'm trying to do too much on my own.

Jesus never encouraged such a thing. "**Come to me**", he would say. Let me do it with you. "**Without me you can do nothing**" was his message. Do we think we can do the right thing just by setting our mind to it? By trying a little harder? By adding one more discipline to the many disciplines we're already carrying?

Recall, for a moment, the first two steps of Alcoholics Anonymous: We have a problem bigger than we are, and we cannot control it; but a higher power can restore us to peace and wholeness. When the alcoholic is trying to beat the habit without any help, his or her efforts reflect the experience of religious minded people who think they can live a decent and virtuous life simply by trying harder! This isolated struggle is a way of saying: "There is nothing I will come up against that I can't handle myself." In effect, this is a subtle way of saying: "I am God!" "I'm able to bring about my own salvation, my own fulfillment." And as long as we are busy being God, we don't need the real God! It's an easy trap to fall into.



"Without me  
you can do nothing."

**J**esus tried his best to **change that.** He taught that no one is perfect, and no one can keep God's law perfectly. Many who heard him were outraged at this because being perfect was what they were brought up to believe they could and should be. They were outraged that Jesus would associate with sinners, that he would sit down to dinner with people who had given up trying to be good by Jewish standards, who had given up trying to keep all the 600 laws of the Torah.



“Why is it so hard for us to believe that we are loved *even* when we are imperfect?”

### Six Minute Reflections for

**Lent** A small booklet of prayers and reflections for the Lenten season is available at the Parish House for one dollar. Authored by the late Bishop Kenneth Untener of Saginaw, Michigan, these booklets have been well received in past years. The goal is to find six minutes of quiet time each day in the Lenten season and walk through this booklet one page at a time.

**T**he irony of this is that because they had given up trying to be perfect they were ready to hear the new message Jesus was bringing of God's grace freely offered to them, imperfect and sinful though they were! Why is it so hard for us to believe that we are loved *even* when we are imperfect? And why do we like to depend more on our own power than on God's?

To admit that we haven't got our lives in control and that we need a power from beyond ourselves is a giant step forward. These are not just necessary steps in a good healing program like Alcoholics Anonymous. This is a big part of the Good News of Jesus Christ. And it may be part of the turnaround in thinking and behavior that this Lenten season is inviting me to make.

Fr. William Bergen, S.J

### LENTEN PROJECT

This year's Lenten collection will benefit Little Sisters of the Poor. It began on Ash Wednesday and ends on April 12. You may leave your loose change (bills and checks are also welcome!) for Joanne Cunneen at the Parish House.

**New CD Reviews!** Please visit the Music section of our website at: [www.saintignatiusloyola.org](http://www.saintignatiusloyola.org) to see our two latest CD reviews of *Les Corps Glorieux* and *Wondrous Love*.

**Saint Ignatius Loyola School** extends a cordial invitation to our St. Patrick's Celebration ~ an evening of traditional food and entertainment ~ on Friday, March 9, from 6:30PM to 9:30PM in McKinnon Hall.

Join us for traditional Irish fare and spirited song and dance! The evening will feature the Aherne/Sheehan School of Dance, the Niall O'Leary School of Dance, the Saint Ignatius Loyola School Violinists (our own talented 'in-house' musicians), and a group Irish dance lesson!

Ticket covers admission and food; children's admission also includes a Celtic craft and face painting. There will be a cash bar.

If you are interested in attending, please call the Development Office: 212/861-3820, ext. 135.



Look in the Narthex and at the Parish House for our **Lent and Easter Brochure, *Hope in Steadfast Love***,

which contains a complete listing of our Lent and Easter Programs.

