

Several years ago I received a phone call from a woman who was ready to do her fifth step in the alcoholic's anonymous 12 step program. After meeting with her I decided to reacquaint myself with the Alcoholic's Anonymous program and it's twelve steps. I went on the internet and brought up the organization's website. As I started to read the brief guide to the program that the webpage provided, I was taken in by a short quote that appeared on the cover page.

I am responsible
When anyone anywhere reaches out for help
I want the hand of AA always to be there
And for that I am responsible.

Interestingly enough when I read this quote I started to think about our celebration this week end of the Ascension of Jesus back to God the Father. When I was reflecting on the whole Ascension experience I had an image in my mind

of Jesus blessing his disciples and then ascending to the Father. I imagined the figure of Christ being lifted up and having one hand reaching for the heavens and one hand still pointing downward connecting with the human world.

Then I started to think about the words that Jesus spoke in Mark's gospel right before he left his followers:

“Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; Whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Going back to that quote from the cover of the AA page, image for a minute that we take out the letters AA and replace them with the word God.

I am responsible
When anyone anywhere reaches out for help
I want the hand of God always to be there and
For that I am responsible.

Hearing that quote in its new form I think we can see the point of the whole Ascension experience. Jesus is rising above the temptation, darkness, and death of our mortal world in order to return to the Father. If we are responsible in the construction of our relationship with God then we can also experience in our lives ascension of our own. If we have faith in God's presence in our lives we can rise above the temptations, the pain, and the loneliness that can prey on the human world.

This faith in God is only as strong as we make it. It takes work to get a strong grip on God. It takes a life of prayer, it takes participation in the Eucharist and in reconciliation. Notice I said PARTICIPATION. Whenever we attend mass we need to sing, pray, and stay focused on what is happening at the altar.

It also means staying for the entire celebration from the prelude to the closing song. I don't understand how people can think that they have participated fully in the Eucharist when they come to mass late or leave church 3 quarters of the way through the celebration.

If we want to rise above the hardships, the illnesses, and the struggles of this world then we have to make a concerted effort to strengthen the bond we have with Christ. Like the AA quote said, we are responsible for making sure the hand of God is there.

As the woman said to me in her session, "But this is so hard" and that's the point it is hard to maintain a sober life and in the same vein it is also hard to maintain a faith life.

As we continue to live in this passing world with all of it's distractions, temptations, and fears we have to work harder at placing God number one in our lives.

We have to get a grip and hang on because with God holding us the only place we can go is up.