

In the lives of us all, it is so easy for things to just kind of gradually get out of control. We tell ourselves hey I'm a pretty good person, there's not too much wrong, but deep down, we have our secrets. One look at this becomes somethings more frequent; one too many becomes something to rely on; one bit of gossip becomes something that grows; one harsh word to our spouse or kids becomes more frequent. How easy it is for things to just snowball. And when this happens, we can do one of two things: we can cover it up, pretend that there's nothing wrong, or we can open our eyes to the reality of the situation and realize we can't do anything about it on our own, but there is a way to freedom that comes through the love of Jesus Christ.

In a short story entitled, "That's Who I Asked," the author going by simply "Dan G" speaks of this journey that he made.

He writes that he had heard it said that religion is for those who don't want to go to hell, but spirituality is for those who have already been there and don't want to go back. As such he says that makes him a spiritual man.

He found himself on an early day in February in hell without hope. There he was, a 48 year old man, divorced and childless, going through the most painful detox he had ever experienced, following to days of ceaseless drinking which were abruptly interrupted. He was at a convention in Las Vegas, working a sales booth for his employer, who had discovered his drinking the day before. His boss forbade him from drinking the rest of the week under penalty of termination. Paralyzing cramps racked his body, and sweat dripped from his face as he tried to pretend nothing was wrong and make small talk and sales.

That night, alone in his room at the MGM Grand, their trademark green floodlights casting a nauseating pallor over his room, a war raged in his body and in his soul. Violent cramps tore at every muscle without relief. He thought he wouldn't survive the night, and in some ways, that was fine with him he thought at the time. For at least death would end his physical suffering and finally stop the daily cycle of drinking, hangover, remorse, resolve and relapse that defined his adult life.

He was the son and grandson of alcoholics. From the time he was 5 years old, he watched his father drink himself to death following his automobile

accident that killed his oldest brother. Dan first got drunk when he was 15, majored in it in college, and pursued it beyond the gates of insanity as an adult.

Ironically he says life had always come easy for him. He did well in school, earned a scholarship to college where he maintained good grades, played in several professional musical combos, advanced rapidly in the business world, and for many years, enjoyed an enviable social life, traveling to all parts of the country following his whims and pleasures.

But what was at first “having a good time” he says eventually became an everyday occurrence that took everything - jobs, homes, relationships, health, joy - and ultimately would have taken his life, just as it did his father’s. Two months before that fateful business trip to Las Vegas, Dan was released after spending his second 3-month stay in jail, this time following his conviction for a third DUI.

He went home to a tiny trailer in a rundown trailer park, surrounded by fellow alcoholics. He drank at least a quart of cheap vodka every night, straight from the bottle. He had nothing to show for his life, no possessions

to speak of, no bank account, no credit card, not even a driver's license. All of the "stuff" he had owned in his life - the fancy cars, the big televisions, the nice furniture, the expensive clothes, the musical instruments - were all long gone. In fact, he had stopped playing music entirely 17 years prior. All the talents with which he had been bestowed, the gifts, all for naught, squandered in a vain attempt to find love and happiness in a bottle.

Three days after returning from Las Vegas, deeply shaken by his horrendous experience there, sober since, and avowed to try something - anything - to change, he found his way to Alcoholics Anonymous. The meeting, a few blocks from his work, was in a one-story warehouse down by the tracks. He walked into the large room with its stained carpet and 60 chairs of all different types. An old desk sat at the end of the room; banners and slogans covered the walls. There, men and women told stories like his, but laughed about their past exploits instead of hiding them in shame. They were happy and smiling, and clearly sober. Dan reflects he wanted what they had, and immediately became willing to do whatever it took to get it.

After the meeting, he approached the chairman. "Where can I buy one of those Big Books," he asked.

A man standing next to him handed him his own, and smiled, saying to him  
“The first one is free.”

Together, they gave him four suggestions to “get” what they had: read the Big Book, attend 90 meetings in 90 days, find a sponsor, and start working on the 12 Steps program.

Dan followed those suggestions, and it turns out, what they had was God, a power greater than themselves that could end their insanity. The conduit to that higher power was prayer.

In fact, daily prayer and meditation were primary elements of the AA program. Dan at the time though didn't quite know how to pray. It wasn't because he didn't believe in God, for he saw evidence of God in the lives of others and had at times felt God's presence, but Dan just didn't think God was relevant or interested in him, so he hadn't petitioned Him with prayer, other than in the darkest moments of the loneliest nights, when impassioned pleas were painfully uttered to an empty silence.

At the AA meeting, he heard an old immigrant, gray-bearded and stout, bellow to the newcomers in his Slavic accent, “you must humble yourself before God!”

So, when Dan got home, he got on his knees with his face on the floor - no small feat for a man who was 6’ 6” - and awkwardly began with the Serenity Prayer. “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.” Then, he added, “Free me from the bondage of self, let it be Thy Will, not my will, always.” Then piecing together things that he had heard, he offered God glory and thanksgiving for the blessings in his life, for his mother, for a wife who loved him, for the roof over his head, for a job. He begged Jesus for the guidance to do the right thing, ending “In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.”

Then, he stiffly rose to his feet.

Within the first week of attending AA meetings and praying every day, Dan writes that God did for him what he had never been able to do for himself. He miraculously removed his cravings and obsession for alcohol. In its

place, He planted a seed of understanding, and a grateful desire to nurture that seed, to live the life God intended for him.

Now, years after that, Dan notes his life is better than he could ever have imagined. He has a loving wife, a secure home, a rewarding job, a wonderful church family and even plays guitar at his church.

There were certainly problems along the way, such as his mom suffering a stroke that eventually took her life, and going through that loss and other challenges, but he's done these things clean without the haze of alcohol, and knows he couldn't have done it without God in his life.

He closes by writing "If someone asks me, 'How do you know it was God who got you sober and did all of those things for you?' he simply explains, "That's who I asked."

Good Friday on the one hand shows us sin in all its ugliness, but it also reveals the depths of God's love.

Sin does to all of us what it did to Dan - it robs us of our happiness. For a time we can function as he did, but inevitably sin will in out without God. This holy day reminds us we need not be afraid, but we also need to be accountable. How easy it can be to blame others; our families, our jobs, our life situations for sin, and to make excuses - it's just to take the edge off, no one knows about it and never will, I'm just short tempered it's how I am, other people do it, it was just this one time. But deep down, when we fall into it, whatever it may be, we know it's not right. Deep down we look at others like Dan at that meeting and say "I want what they have."

The alcoholic though of course still is an alcoholic; but the people at that meeting were smiling because they had made peace, but also did as the old Slavic man told Dan to do, they humbled themselves before God.

So on this day, two questions.

The first, is what are your shadows? When we are judged before God, all the card are laid on the table. There is no more hiding. So now is the time to get them out into the open. Reflect on your battles in your heart. Stop making excuses. Embrace these shadows.



Second, heed Dan's advice. Ask Jesus to help you. Mother Angelica, the founder of EWTN network, once stressed that even if you were the only person in the world, Jesus would have died for you. How true this is, for such is the radical nature of the love of God. As you come up in a few moments to venerate the cross and then to receive Holy Communion, think about this love. And let this love heal you, Live no longer in the shadows, but in the love of God knowing that Jesus looks at you not with harsh judgment or condemnation, but with the eyes of mercy.

This Good Friday offers us a remarkable opportunity for self-reflection and growth. It can offer us two great realizations for our spiritual life: first, God is God, we're not God, and second, we are all sinners in need of the loving embrace offered to us by Christ on the Cross.

What is wrong is that each of us put Christ on the cross. Christ knows our sinfulness; He also knows our worth. May we have the courage, strength, and peace of mind to live in thanksgiving for the Passion of our Lord, reaching out, and letting Him reach in.