

In February of 1968 I was appointed to St. John the Baptist Parish in downtown, Schenectady. Not many days after I arrived there, a man came to the rectory door and explained that he and his associates put on a meeting every Tuesday evening in the county jail. He asked me, would I join them and so I did. The man's name was Tom and we become very good friends.

He invited me to go with him to alcoholics Anonymous Meetings and so I did. Although I am not an alcoholic, I was very impressed by these meetings. People whose lives had been tortured by the consumption of alcohol, who were addicts, were remaining sober. I noticed that there was a deep sense of community among the members of the group and a strong spirituality. They professed their powerlessness over alcohol and the need to recognize and be devoted to their Higher Power. They were able to make big changes in their lives and maintain them.

St. John the Baptist appears in today's Gospel proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, "prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths". He is calling us to change. Change the way in which you talk to your wife, to your husband, your children. Change the habit you have of judging your neighbor. Change, change, change!

But how hard it is to change! That's the reason I mentioned Alcoholics Anonymous this morning. These are people who have changed. At least thousands, even millions of people have changed. They have made a major act of humility, i.e., acknowledged their powerlessness. How hard, how humbling that is to do; yet how rewarding.

Now, I'm going to make a huge leap. I believe we need that same sense of community, of closeness in our parish community if each of us going to get the strength, the courage to change; the courage to admit that we are weak, powerless in so many ways. We need support to stop judging one another, to be more sensitive to the needs of others. The list goes on and on.

So I'm proposing that we form small faith sharing groups in our parish<sup>73</sup>. The groups could meet once or twice a month (or more often for those who desire).

There's no need for lots of books. Usually, we choose the Scripture readings from the Sunday Mass. We use a very simple method which will be explained to you.

This method is called Lectio Divina, and I'll tell you more about it in the new year. I believe we need one another and especially the help of God. We need the Holy Eucharist which joins us to one another in Jesus' love and strength.