

Day 18- Praying for Americans Addicted to Drugs, Alcohol and Gambling

by Bernadette Love

*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.
Colossians 1:13*

There are over 17.6 million Americans - about 1 in every 12 adults - who abuse alcohol or are alcohol dependent. Alcohol is the leading risk factor in deaths of males aged 15-59. Over 3 million people in the U.S. use cocaine. More than 10 million Americans abuse prescription medications. More than 1 million citizens need treatment for heroin addiction. Alcohol dependence and drug abuse cost the United States over \$200 billion a year. Do we have a problem? I say yes.

Freedom from Addiction
by Sarah Phillips

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12: 1-2

Have you ever met someone you thought was beyond God's reach? Someone whose life has sunk to such depths all seems hopeless? Most of us can think of people we've encountered like that. It may even be someone we love.

When we start to lose hope for another's soul, it's good to remind ourselves that some of the greatest Christian Saints were some of the most broken people. This week, in my search for Christian heroes, I encountered the story of one such person that did not resemble the perfect stained-glass images I grew up with. His name was Matthew Talbot, and here's a glimpse into his life.

The second of 13 children, Matthew was born in Dublin, Ireland on May 2, 1856. His family was poor and heavy drinking was the norm among his father and brothers. So from the start, Matthew was predisposed to alcoholism -- and sure enough, his drinking began at age 12.

As Matthew entered his teen years, odd jobs led way to a career working with bricklayers. While the local community considered him excellent at his trade, his drinking became central to his life. By the time his twenties arrived, it was common for Matthew to spend all his earned wages obtaining alcohol. When that wasn't enough, he began selling his possessions and eventually resorted to credit. Finally, after racking up too much debt, he

sunk to an all-time low: stealing.

Not only was Matthew a heavy drinker-turned-thief, but he had a terrible temper and a vulgar tongue. Gripped by his disease and his poor choices, Matthew's life was going nowhere. His mother, Elizabeth, pleaded with him to change his ways. Finally, Matthew's life sunk so low he had no earthly place to turn.

So, in 1884, Matthew's mother received an answer to her prayers. The 28-year-old went to the only place left to go: Church. There, he confessed his sins and took a pledge to avoid drinking for 3 months. He seemed an unlikely candidate to keep the pledge. Yet Matthew had experienced an interior conversion in that church.

Three months passed, and he was still sober. Inspired by his progress, he pledged to avoid drinking for life and also gave up tobacco.

While Matthew's first several years of sobriety consisted of intense, interior battles, he lived the rest of his life with unwavering devotion to God. The once angry, vulgar Irishman became kind to those he encountered, and he paid back all his debts. He lived simply, prayed daily, and served those in need, eventually taking monastic vows.

Mathew Talbot died at age 69 while walking to church. He had been sober for 41 years.

Matthew's story is a testament to God's transforming power as well as our participation in that transformation. A tearful mother pleaded, a broken young man made a decision to change, and God poured out His graces. It's also worth noting that Matthew, with the help of his pastor, employed many of the same steps later incorporated into the Alcoholic's Anonymous 12-Step program. While he wasn't healed overnight, Matthew Talbot eventually experienced new life, giving hope to those battling addictions and the people who love them.

Dear God, the journey from addiction to recovery is a journey from slavery and bondage to self-determination and freedom. You want Your people to be free. Help those addicted to drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex etc. to become free. Show them a better way, dear Lord.

Father, we know that with freedom comes great responsibility. Help us to find Your will for us this day and every day. Amen.