

Saints and Sinners

Encountering Brokenness Among Believers

“This gym will change your life!”

A friend raves about his gym, sharing enthusiastically how exercise changes one’s life, and you decide to check it out. Walking around, you see a number of very fit people, exercising with focus. But you also notice a lot of people who aren’t doing much. They seem more concerned with socializing than getting in shape. And in the corner, you see your friend, taking a nap on one of the exercise balls!

We experience a similar phenomenon in church.

In pretty much every faith community, one will find people who are passionate about God and live out their faith whole-heartedly. But one will also find people who are going through the motions, or who are not practicing what they preach, perhaps even among those who are leaders or well-regarded. If you have been hurt or scandalized by someone who should have been an example of faith, it might be helpful to consider the following reflections.

God is still worth knowing, even though his followers fail.

There are many things in life worth doing, even though people involved are flawed. In our analogy, the napping friend has not been faithful to exercise, but this doesn’t mean that exercise and good nutrition aren’t worthwhile pursuits. Just because some people who follow God don’t practice what they preach, it doesn’t mean that God isn’t real or that he isn’t worth knowing.

Each of us are sinners in need of salvation.

If we are honest with ourselves, we can probably see how we have often wanted to live a certain way but have failed, or sins that we have struggled with but just couldn’t seem to overcome. We are all broken to one degree or another; “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) Remembering our own human weakness can help give us some perspective when we encounter indifference or outright evil among some of Christ’s followers.

There is no perfect gym, and no perfect group of believers.

If we were to wait for a church full of perfect members, we would never be part of a church! Jesus told us this would be the case: his church would be full of wheat and weeds, saints and sinners, until the end of time. (Matthew 13:24-30) To a certain degree, we are all weeds. We all have sins and brokenness. Thankfully, the Church is meant to be a hospital for sinners, not a club for perfect people.

Be inspired by those who are spiritually fruitful.

The quality of a gym is best seen by looking at those who take advantage of all it offers. Similarly, the value of a church is best seen by looking at those who make full use of its spiritual treasures. Such believers will still have weaknesses, but one should be able to see a peace and a joy in their lives. In the Catholic Church, we are inspired by people like Francis of Assisi or Mother Teresa, whose lives were transformed by Christ’s grace in beautiful and amazing ways.

