

**PRAY** Jesus, people listen to you because you speak with authority. Help us find the authority that comes from being in union with you. Give us the courage to speak up and speak out. Help us know we are never alone. Amen.

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time



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# SPiRIT

Almost **1 in 5** adult Americans (18%) lived with an **alcoholic** while growing up. About **76 million** Americans (43% of the U.S. adult population) have been exposed to alcoholism in the family. An estimated **11 million children** of alcoholics are under **age 18**. Children of alcoholics are at **greater risk** for alcoholism than children of nonalcoholics.

—National Association for Children of Alcoholics, National Clearing House on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, [www.nacoa.net/impfacts](http://www.nacoa.net/impfacts)

## Wish Upon a Star

By Cathy Mackiewicz



**Christie stole a glance at her mother, who just came in after a visit to the local bar.** Her baby sister, Rose, was crying again. Christie's mother stumbled toward the couch and slumped in front of the television. She tried to compose herself by straightening her wrinkled skirt and tugging at her soft pink sweater. She pushed a strand of hair from her face, quickly showing irritation.





Eric Ryerson recommends in his book *When Your Parent Drinks Too Much* that

**“Your well-being must be your top priority. . . . Your safety is first. Leave your house (when you don’t feel safe). Reach out for help. Don’t get in the car with a drunken parent. Carry around a list of emergency phone numbers.”**

**“The main thing to remember is that you aren’t alone and there is support in your schools and communities to bring light and hope for a more positive future.”**

“Get your sister, Christie,” she ordered. Her words slurred and her droopy eyelids opened with the sudden awareness that she could not just drift off to sleep. “Has she been crying all night?”

Christie could feel anger building inside. She had spent the entire evening watching the clock and worrying when her mother would get home. Now, she brought with her the smell of cigarette smoke mingled with the smell of alcohol. It sickened Christie’s stomach. She felt her heart pound and sweat begin to moisten her hands.

“I’ve been taking care of Rose all night,” Christie said. She gathered her sister in her arms, smelling the soft scent of baby powder she had put on her after her bath. Rose’s little hand immediately reached for Christie’s long blonde hair. She began to twirl it in her fingers in a soothing manner. Christie could hear Rose sucking her thumb in an effort to block out the shouts and hysteria and go back to sleep.

**Christie remembered the times she slept comfortably through the night.** In those days, her

mother wasn’t out late at night and coming in drunk, shameful, and angry at the world. She remembered the good times before her father left and her parents seemingly perfect marriage began to fall apart. Her mother’s shout brought her back to the ugly reality facing her.

“Are you trying to argue with me?” Her mother raised herself from the couch and staggered toward Christie. The smell of alcohol and sweat from her mother almost smothered Christie.

“I’m not arguing. I’ve been trying to get my homework done. The baby was just starting to get to sleep. What am I supposed to do?” Christie brushed away the tears stinging her eyes.

“I’ll take care of her then, if you can’t help. Just get out of here!” Christie felt her mother’s strong grip on her arm and a wave of anxiety immobilized her for a few seconds. She ran from the house and sat on

the deck in the backyard. She gazed at the stars in the dark night and tried to think what to do. She put her hands on her head to quiet the eruption inside of her.

Pacing the yard, she cried about the lost time with the mother she used to know. She sat and rocked back and forth with her arms wrapped around her for comfort. Christie remembered her grandmother’s words and pictured her standing in front of her.

**The warmth that came from that image began to restore her strength.** She envisioned

her grandmother’s smiles hiding the pain and concern in her soft brown eyes. Christie heard her words over and over again, as if playing a tape.

“Christie,” her grandmother said in her matter-of-fact tone, “Come to me for help when your mother starts drinking. She’s sick, Christie. She needs help. If it gets too much for you, come to me. We’ll make sure

## Alateen members learn:



**Compulsive drinking is a disease.**

**They can** detach themselves from the problems while continuing to love the person.

**They are not** the cause of anyone else’s drinking or behavior.

**They cannot** change or control anyone but themselves.

**They have** spiritual and intellectual resources with which to develop their own potentials no matter what happens at home.

**They can** build satisfying and rewarding life experiences for themselves. [al-anon.org](http://al-anon.org)

she gets help. All of us. We'll take care of you and Rose."

Christie took a few long, deep breaths to steady her emotions. She sat for a few minutes until she felt calmer. She gazed into the dark night and found a single star to wish upon. *If there is hope, twinkle*, she thought. *Give me a sign to go back in there and do what needs to be done.* The star appeared to get larger and Christie prayed quietly to do the right thing.

**Christie returned to the house and stood in front of her mother, who sat on the couch, her eyes closing from time to time as she fought off sleep.** The baby had gone back to sleep, and the house had an eerie silence.

"Mama, I can't take it anymore. You have been drinking every weekend and now during the week. I worry if you are even going to come home some nights. You have to get some help. I'm leaving until you do. I'm taking Rose with me to Grandma's."

Christie took another breath to settle her trembling hands before reaching for the baby. She picked Rose up from her crib and blocked out everything around her before walking toward the door.

"Christie, you come back here. You can leave, but you are not taking Rose with you!"

Christie continued walking out the door with Rose. She saw the tears begin to trickle down her mother's face, distorted with feelings of anger and fear. Still, she kept walking.

**Each step made Christie more certain she was doing the right thing.** Grandma lived less than a mile away. She thought of the long hours her mother worked to support them and the affectionate nickname "Punky" she called her. It had been a long time since she'd heard that name.

Christie knew that if she didn't leave, her mother would come to

## SUNDAY GOSPEL

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Jesus speaks with authority.

**NARRATOR 1:** Jesus and his followers arrived in Capernaum, and at once on the Sabbath he went into the synagogue and began to teach.

**NARRATOR 2:** The people were amazed at his teaching because he taught with authority, not like the scribes.

**NARRATOR 1:** There was a man in their synagogue with an unholy spirit. He shrieked aloud.

**MAN:** What do we have in common, Jesus of Nazareth? Why do you interfere? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.

**JESUS:** Be silent. Come out of the man.

**NARRATOR 2:** At that the unholy spirit convulsed the man violently and with a loud cry came out of him.

**NARRATOR 1:** This so astounded the people that they began to question among themselves.

**PEOPLE:** What is this? What new teaching is this that with authority he commands even unholy spirits and they obey!

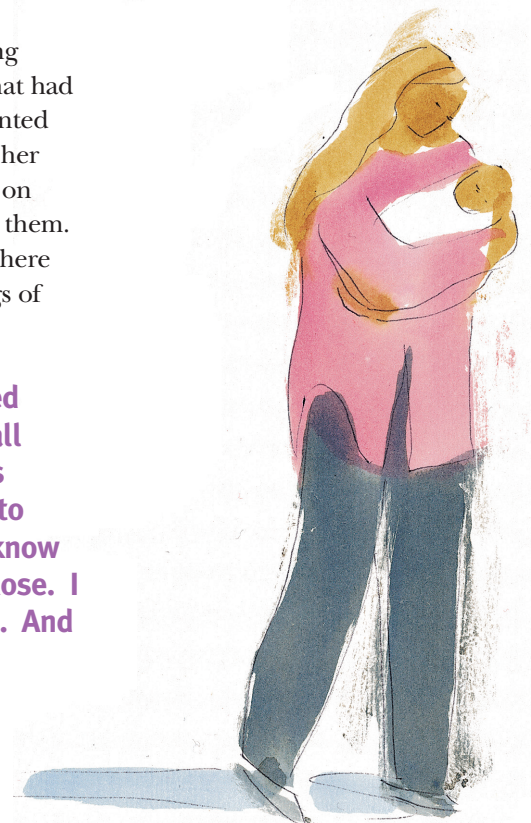
**NARRATOR 2:** His reputation spread immediately throughout the surrounding region in Galilee.

Mark 1.21-28

**QUESTIONS** 1 What makes Christie angry about her mother's drinking? 2 Why does she leave? 3 What makes her decision to leave hard? 4 How do the people in the synagogue respond to Jesus? How does the unholy spirit respond? 5 What qualities in a person cause you to pay attention to their words? 6 If Jesus were to walk into your home or school tomorrow, what issues do you think he might confront?

the kitchen table in the morning without saying a word about what had happened tonight. Christie wanted her to remember. She wanted her to remember so they could get on with putting everything behind them. She wanted her to get help so there wouldn't be any more mornings of pained silence.

The baby's cries interrupted Christie's thoughts. "It's all right, Baby Rose. Mama is drunk again. We're going to Grandma's house. She'll know what to do. It's all right, Rose. I love you. Mama loves you. And Grandma loves you, too."





# Who does Jesus stand by?

**W**here do we stand when Jesus is crucified? The scene on Good Friday is recreated around us in small ways every day. When someone at school is ridiculed, hurt or excluded, what do we do? Do we help pound in the nails? Stand in the crowd and jeer? Walk on by, pretending not to see? Watch silently, afraid to take action? Stand at Jesus' side in solidarity? Or do we have the courage to challenge the tormenters?

We don't need to pound in nails to contribute to another's suffering. "The

**Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church #1935*

bystander effect" is a name for what happens when observers stay silent while another is being hurt. People who have been the target of abuse of any kind report that bystanders' silence can be as painful as the ridicule or violence itself.

Jesus refused to be a bystander. When a man shrieked during a Sabbath service, Jesus addressed him. When people were sick and in pain, he spoke to them and touched them.

When his disciples didn't get the message, he came back at them and



Reuters/Sean Gardner

explained again. When it came time to go to Jerusalem, he set his face toward certain death.

Jesus knew who he was and where he was going. He found strength and clarity through prayer. Before he began his public ministry, Jesus spent 40 days alone in the desert. When he was exhausted he went away and took time to pray. The night before he died Jesus needed time alone to find the strength for the ordeal ahead.

**F**inding our own authority can be difficult. Many outside forces tug at us. Our friends, our families, our teachers, the media, our plans for the future, the people we're dating—all shape us.

People in our lives have expectations. They have opinions about how we should handle our time, what we should say and not say, what priorities we should hold. But no matter how much family and friends love us, they can't BE us. Ultimately, they can't make our important decisions for us.

We need to listen to those around us. Often they can see opportunities or pitfalls that we might miss. But we also need to listen to the quiet voice within us, the voice that comes from God.

For a long time, Christie seemed to stand alone. The powerful message from her mother was: Don't rock the boat. It's no big deal. But Christie listens to the voice within and takes the first steps toward health for herself and her baby sister. She will not be a bystander any longer to her own pain or to her sister's neglect. Christie is an ordinary kid who refuses to be silent, who has the courage to confront the injustice she experiences in her own living situation.

**J**esus looked like an ordinary carpenter's son wandering dusty roads, preaching in small towns and hilltops. Yet he challenged oppressive spirits, blindness, arrogance, disease, hardheartedness, and even death. His life transformed the world.

As Christians we are called to follow Jesus' example. Opportunities surround us to speak up against all injustice or be silent, to stand in solidarity or join in harassment. What will we do?

## FAITH in ACTION

1 Develop

a "script" you can use when you hear someone say something derogatory about people of other races. A short, noncombative response is, "That makes me uncomfortable." 2 Do some roleplays, re-enacting disrespectful conversations you have heard or can imagine. Practice confronting with authority but without hostility. 3 As a group, meet with a religious education class for younger children. Talk with them about the issues of racism and exclusion.