

We who suffer with or know those who suffer with addiction should understand that it is a complex array of dysfunction involving the mind in all its manifestations, and the body in which our spiritual, emotional and mental forces find a home. Given the complexity of this primary disease, metaphors are often helpful in our ongoing attempt to understand addiction and ourselves. Our presenter, Terisita Calero, gave us the perhaps surprising metaphor of “zebra” as a window into this disease.

During her presentation, complete with zebra props providing a bit of comic relief to her serious topic, she likened the addict/alcoholic’s need to “stay with the herd” just as zebras do for protection and life itself. When we wander from our herd of fellow sufferers who have found healing from a Higher Power and “In The Rooms” then we, like the zebra, run the risk of being captured by our enemy we have fought so long and hard to avoid with our constant vigilance.

Certainly given the destructive hyper-individualism of our time staying with the herd may be more difficult than it sounds because, unlike zebras, we must maintain the concentrated effort of a grace-filled will to realize that our individuality is best developed in a loving, healing and supportive community whether this is found in family, 12 step groups or the church.

This is so because the destructive individuality of the addicted personality will inevitably lead us, like the zebra, to sacrifice our lives to fear because of our lack of commitment and attachment with the inevitable loss of love. We were told that zebras sometimes panic in fear and, in so doing, rush blindly headlong into the nearest obstacle only to be killed. I suspect that those of us who mimic the zebra in this

regard, having experienced something of the joy of sobriety, panic when we allow ourselves to believe that addiction might somehow be better than sobriety, that life might be fuller – or at least more manageable – when we drink or use. It is precisely at this time that we must believe – because our lives depend on it – that, in God’s hands, we have nothing to fear. The further we draw away from our Higher Power who is most always manifested to us in others, the closer we come to death because we do not and cannot ever possess the ability to defeat the enemy on our own. In this way, our community – our zebras, if you will – becomes a sacramental realization of the saving work of Christ for us and for our salvation.

I believe that the journey of the addicted from death to life is, quite wonderfully, the journey of the Christian writ large. Those of us who are addicted and have found recovery know that we progress in wellness in the same way we progress in Christian living. We become well, that is to say, more Christ like, through and with the support and prayers of many others on the same journey. As we die to our old selves of addiction, worshipped as an idol as much as any other object who is not God, we rise to amazing newness of life in the Christian community who, when healthy, reflects and manifests God’s love to us. And, I would say, just as Christ became obedient to death and was raised, so we have carried our crosses, suffered and died to be raised up that we might raise up others who suffer.