

I was in prison and you visited me. Matthew 25:36

Voices From prison

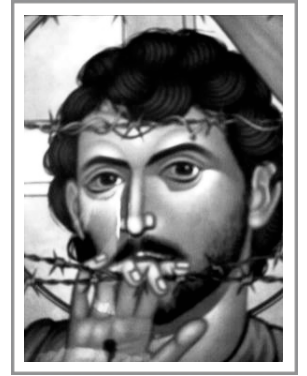
A newsletter from Adeodatus prison ministry

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Oh baby, love, my baby love I need you, oh how I need you—Diana Ross

Turning Your Own Key

by Anthony



When I look back and take an honest assessment of myself in terms of standing on my own two feet—I'd have to say that I've been fully dependent on others. From my earliest memory—someone has housed and fed me. During my early childhood it was my mother who provided for me. Then, from the age of 10-13, a series of temporary foster homes/group homes sheltered me. From early teens (14 years old) until I was 40—I've been sheltered, clothed, and fed by institutions, such as St. Michael's, St. Gabe's and Vision Quest, or prisons—state and county—or by the many women who've entered into dysfunctional relationships with me.

As an adult, there have been a few periods when I was responsible for paying my own way, but lacking a foundation for being self-reliant and being an addict, I soon found myself overwhelmed and looking for someone to take care of me. Looking back, I realize this happened again and again without my even thinking about it. My being dependent upon others seemed as natural and acceptable to me as dependence on heroin.

I'm clean and sober for the first time in my life, 18 months now. My recovery started on the streets, before I was sentenced. It wasn't until I got clean and became willing to change that I was forced to face the full extent of my dependency. It's clear to me now that I have never been my own man—that for most of my life I have placed myself under the authority and control of prisons and the women who've paid my way.

Not long ago, another inmate and I were recounting for one another the times we were thrown out by the women we were dependent on. One of the most infuriating things I've experienced (over and over) is hearing a woman talk down to me as I'm packing my things after she's told me "Get out of my house!" The other inmate shared with me something he had heard from his father long ago. His father had told him, "Always turn your own key" (meaning: be self-sufficient).

The more I talk to other inmates, the more I realize that I am not alone—that this dependent lifestyle is common among men in prison. I also know that this cycle of dependence can be broken, and that only I can break it. If I don't change—nothing changes. I no longer find it acceptable for prison guards and women to hold all the keys—I will do whatever it takes to become self-reliant—so that I can turn my own key.

A BRIEF REFLECTION

What a clear and humble statement this former inmate has offered to us! It makes us at Adeodatus especially proud, because Anthony is a participant at our weekly support group meetings. If an individual person like him can rise out of the cycle of dependency he describes, it gives us hope that many can.

Thank you, Anthony.

The most amazing point he raises—and one that all of us can learn from—is how seductive dependency is...*Someone to take care of me*. When you are cold and lonely, doesn't this sound wonderful? Many love songs suggest this is what we are all searching for in order to be happy...*Someone to take care of me*. Religions may even present God this way. What would it be like to believe in a God who is truly our Savior precisely when he is coaxing us out of our dependency?

Imagine if many men and women wind up in prison because it actually feels like someone is taking care of them—even in such a humiliating way! Could this be a substitute for an adult relationship of love because no one has ever taught them how to stand on their own. If the prison system simply reinforces this dependency, no wonder the recidivism rate in the Philadelphia Prison is somewhere near 80%! How can we break this pattern? The first step, it would seem, is to recognize and name it as Anthony has done for us. This raises some questions you may want to discuss with your friends:

- 1) If drug and alcohol addiction is primarily an addiction to *dependency*, how can we raise this wider and deeper issue in the 12 step movement? In the churches? In our families? In other words, do you turn your own key?
- 2) In relationships, are you more likely to be *dependent*, or is it the other way around? Is there a healthy dependency? What does this look like?
- 3) How might God be coaxing you out of any unhealthy dependency right now?

How to get involved

We distribute to 12 parishes, and this year to universities in the Greater Philadelphia area. If you wish to distribute this in any way, please let s know. Any donation would greatly help this mission.

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Join us any Wednesday evening (7:30 – 9 P.M.) at St. Rita of Cascia rectory at 1166 S. Broad Street (at Federal) Philadelphia, PA for fellowship and support.