

Life

St. Camillus de Lellis was born in Italy in 1550. His mother died early, and his father was a soldier. He was being neglected as he grew up and started going to battles with his father at the age of 13. He was six feet six inches tall, and at the age of 17, he worked as a mercenary until 1574 when his regiment was disbanded. He became a gambler. Seeing the kindness of a Franciscan friar, he applied to join the Franciscan Monastery but was not accepted. He went to a hospital in Rome to work as well as treat his leg wound, but was dismissed after nine months because he was always quarrelsome. He rejoined the army and his gambling addiction worsened such that he even lost his own weapon. After the war, Camillus was penniless and made a living by building a house for the Capuchin Friars, but his gambling addiction persisted until the guardian of the convent gave him an exhortation. Camillus was shaken and repented; he knelt and begged the Lord for forgiveness. He was allowed to enter the Capuchin Monastery, but was soon dismissed due to his incurable leg disease.

When Camillus was 25, he returned to the hospital in Rome for treatment. He personally experienced the incompetence of nurses at the time and their lack in enthusiasm for work. When his leg treatment was temporarily effective, he devoted himself to nursing work, and due to his fervour and prudence, he was promoted to the director of the hospital. After his conversion, Camillus led a pious life, and he intended to form a lay order dedicated to the care of the sick, but met with many resistances. After receiving the advice from friends and his spiritual director St. Philip Neri, he began to learn Latin. He was ordained a priest at age 34, and he established the order of "Servants of the Sick". In addition to the traditional sacred vows, this order added the sacred vow to serve the sick. The order expanded and is now in different countries, establishing hospitals, treating patients with love, and especially providing spiritual assistance for patients and palliative care. Camillus was unwell himself, and his leg wound caused him to suffer for more than forty years. At his later years, he had sores all over his leg, causing him much pain. However he permitted no one to wait on him, and only sent members to serve other patients. Camillus was totally disabled shortly before his death, but he often got up late at night to check on the patients' needs one by one at their beds. He died at the age of 64, and the church designated him as the patron saint of the sick, nurses and medical organizations.

Reflection

Since he lost the weapons that protected his life as a mercenary to gambling, Camillus should be a pathological gambler. All addicts have a story behind them. Camillus grew up in a neglected environment; no one would be compassionate to this tall strong man. With no academic achievement and no skills, he had to work as a mercenary who fought to earn a living in his youth, facing injury, wounds, and even death on a daily basis. On top of that he had incurable illness. It is understandable that he gambled to numb his heart and soul. Although he lost all his fortune, there was in fact no reason or motivation for him to quit gambling. The guardian of the convent might have been the first person who wanted him to repent and was willing to spend time to teach him. When Camillus felt cared for he was willing to reform himself. He first prayed to the Lord, then stayed away from the temptations in his environment, and associated with people who could help him spiritually, such as St. Philip Neri. He began to put himself in other people's shoes to care about the sick around him. After that, he formed a community, and engaged himself enthusiastically in work of charity.

St. Camillus' approach is similar to some models today that help addicts quit their addictions. For example, the Cenacolo Community in Medjugorje does not rely on drugs, but work through faith, prayer, and works of love to help young people quit bad habits and re-establish a community with Jesus Christ as the centre of their lives. Besides going to the casinos, some people are obsessed in gambling because electronic gambling is so convenient and easy these days. Like other addicts, they need physical, mental and spiritual support to quit. Let us care for these brothers and sisters with love and pray for them.

Prayer

St. Camillus' companion wrote a biography for him, describing that when he looked at patients, he was like looking at Christ, and even asked them for forgiveness. The work of St. Camillus has become his prayer. He saw Christ in the sick, and each of his action and word was communicating with Christ. We should also learn from him to care for the sick around us. Currently we face the shortness and burnt out of medical professions; let us pray for them.

May we learn from St. Camillus de Lellis to rely on the Lord to get rid of bad habits, and see Christ in those who need our care. We especially pray for pathological gamblers, the sick and medical staff.

St. Camillus de Lellis, pray for us.