

Venerable Matthew Talbot¹ **1856 - 1925**

Matthew Talbot was born on May 2, 1856, the second of 12 siblings, in Dublin, Ireland. He had three sisters and nine brothers, three of whom died young. His father Charles was a dockworker and his mother, Elizabeth, was a housewife. When Matthew was about 12 years old, he started to drink alcohol. His father was a known alcoholic as well as all his brothers. The eldest brother, John, was the exception. Charles tried to dissuade Matthew with severe punishments but without success.

Matthew worked as a messenger boy when he was twelve and then transferred to another messenger job at the same place his father worked. After working there for three years, he became a bricklayer's laborer. He was a hodman, which meant he fetched mortar and bricks for the bricklayers. He was considered "the best hodman in Dublin."

As he grew into an adult, he continued to drink excessively. He continued to work but spent all his wages on heavy drinking. When he got drunk, he became very hot-tempered, got into fights, and swore. He became so desperate for more drinks that he would buy drinks on credit, sell his boots or possessions, or steal people's possession so he could exchange it for more drinks. He refused to listen to his mother's plea to stop drinking. He eventually lost his own self-respect. One day when he was broke, he loitered around a street corner waiting for his "friends" who were leaving work after they were paid their wages. He had hoped that they would invite him for a drink but they ignored him. Dejected, he went home and publicly resolved to his mother, "I'm going to take the pledge." His mother smiled and responded, "Go, in God's name, but don't take it unless you are going to keep it." As Matthew was leaving, she continued, "May God give you strength to keep it."

Matthew went straight to confession at Clonliffe College and took a pledge not to drink for three months. The next day he went back to Church and received communion for the first time in years. From that moment on, in 1884 when he was 28 years old, he became a new man. After he successfully fulfilled his pledge for three months, he made a life-long pledge. He even made a pledge to give up his pipe and tobacco. He used to use about seven ounces of tobacco a week. At one point he said that it had cost him more to give up tobacco than to give up alcohol.

"It was a tough programme of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. That was fifty years before AA was founded. After a horrendous struggle, he found sobriety through prayer and self-sacrifice. His Higher Power was the Christian God. He remained sober for forty years until his death. His life story has been an inspiration for alcoholics and addicts throughout the world. He is a candidate for canonization in the Catholic Church.

¹ Unless otherwise cited, taken from <http://www.savior.org/saints/talbot.htm>

Matt's program of recovery was built around devotion to the Eucharist, love of Mary the Mother of God, spiritual reading, self-discipline and manual work. But he never forgot his struggle with his addiction. 'Never look down on a man, who cannot give up the drink', he told his sister, 'it is easier to get out of hell!'

Most of the favors attributed to his intercession world-wide are for addicts and their families. Hundreds have been reported. Some day he may be declared the patron saint for addicts."²

The new converted Matthew never swore. He was good humored and amicable to everyone. He continued to work as a hodman and then as a laborer for timber merchants. He used his wages to pay back all his debts. He lived modestly and his home was very spartan. He developed into a very pious individual who prayed every chance he got. He attended Mass every morning and made devotions like the Stations of the Cross or devotions to the Blessed mother in the evenings. He fasted, performed acts of mortification, and financially supported many religious organizations. He read biographies of St. Teresa of Avila, St. Therese of Lisieux, and St. Catherine of Sienna. He later joined the Third Order of St. Francis on October 18, 1891 even though a young pious girl proposed to marry him. Physically, he suffered from kidney and heart ailments. During the two times he was hospitalized, he spent much time in Eucharistic adoration in the hospital chapel. Eventually, Matthew died on June 7, 1925 while walking to Mass. He was 69 years old. Here is a wonderful quote from Matthew to remember:

"Three things I cannot escape: the eye of God, the voice of conscience, the stroke of death. In company, guard your tongue. In your family, guard your temper. When alone guard your thoughts."

Small group discussion questions:

- 1) How does Matt Talbot's story give you hope? Is there a struggle in your life that you need help to be freed from or have you experienced God's freedom and healing in an area of your life that used to be a struggle for you?
- 2) Is there someone in your own life who you could pray for asking Matt's intercession?
- 3) Matt Talbot says, "In company, guard your tongue. In your family, guard your temper. When alone guard your thoughts." Why is this important? Which one is the biggest temptation for you?
- 4) What else strikes you about Matt Talbot's story? How does his story inspire you?

² <http://www.circleofprayer.com/matt-talbot.html>