Plot Synopsis for “The Cop and the Anthem”

Murphy’s Law - Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.

1. It is a cold autumn night in New York City.
2. Soapy, who sleeps on a Madison Square park bench in warm weather, decides to get arrested for some minor offense so he can spend the winter in prison.
3. Soapy plots to order dinner in a fancy restaurant and explain after eating that he cannot pay, but the headwaiter refuses to admit him.
4. Soapy’s next plan involves breaking a shop window, but the policeman decides he must not be the guilty party.
5. Soapy tries his restaurant scheme again at a more moderate place, but the waiter only throws him out when he doesn’t pay.
6. Attempts at bothering a woman, creating a disturbance, and stealing an umbrella also fail to get him arrested.
7. Furious at the fickleness of fate, Soapy starts back toward his park bench.
8. He stops outside a church, transfixed by the sound of an organ.
9. The music fills him with the resolve to change his way of life and earn an honest living.
10. Then a policeman comes up and arrests him for loitering.
11. The next morning, Soapy is sentenced to three months in jail.

Literary Analysis Challenges for “The Cop and the Anthem”

O. Henry could have ended his story with Soapy’s resolution to change his way of life. In your opinion, would that have made a better story? Why or why not?

O. Henry filled his story with situational irony. List and explain two examples.