



REJOICE in the LORD

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We are all called to be holy men and holy women, "saints next door."

Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48)

In his Apostolic Exhortation *GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE, ON THE CALL TO HOLINESS IN TODAY'S WORLD*, Pope Francis calls our attention to what the Second Vatican Council termed "the universal call to holiness." We Catholics believe that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God, and all of us—no matter who we are or what our personal history may be—are called to be holy.

What does it mean to be holy? According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "the desire for God is written in the human heart" (#27). We human beings are meant to search for God, to find him and to become united with him—both here on Earth and in our heavenly home.

Holiness is the quality of our union with God, the indication of our closeness to him. Holy women and men are close to God. That's why we call them "saints," which comes from the Latin word *sanctus* or holy.

In his encyclical "Spe Salvi" ("Saved by Hope"), Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI writes: "Life is a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we watch for the stars that indicate the route. The true stars of our life are the people who have lived good lives." They are the lights of hope, the Holy Father writes, because they point us to Jesus Christ, "the true light, the sun that has risen above all the shadows of history" (#49).

Saints shine with the light of Christ. Many of the saints have been officially recognized by the Church through a process that results in the solemn proclamation (canonization) that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace.

But during the last 2,000 years, many other holy women and men have given themselves wholeheartedly to Jesus Christ without being declared saints by the Church. These are the men and women that Pope Francis calls "the middle class of holiness" or "saints next door." These are the saints we celebrate on Nov. 1, the Solemnity of All Saints.

All of us are called to holiness, to closeness to God, but unfortunately, most of us find ourselves further away from God than we would like to be. That's why Christ gives us the sacraments—especially the Eucharist and the sacrament of penance—to help us in our daily struggles on the way to holiness. We are all called to be close to God, but for many of us (most of us?), the journey is a long and difficult one.

Thanks be to God; his grace and mercy are endless. Our loving and merciful God never gives up on us. Even after we die, we Christians believe that it is still possible to atone for our sins, to grow in holiness and come closer to God. That's why we pray for those who have died.

It's also why the Church celebrates the feast of All Souls on Nov. 2. We are all called to become holy—both the living and the dead—and the grace of our Lord Jesus is not confined to this world, but can reach even into the state of being we call purgatory, to touch the hearts of those "poor souls" who must undergo a process of purification before being fully united with God.

Saints are men and women who know how to pray, to be close to God and communicate with him from the heart. They are people who in times of difficulty, as well as in good times, raise their minds and hearts to the Lord. The saints seek God's will in their lives. They share with him their hopes and frustrations, their loneliness, anger and fear. Through their prayer, their attentive listening even more than the words they speak, the holy men and women we call saints are in constant contact with God.

As we recall the holy people—living and deceased—who serve as stars guiding us to Christ, let's pray for the grace to let God's love and mercy touch our hearts and bring us closer to him, so that we too can be holy as our Heavenly Father is holy.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,



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A selection from *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 5, on The Universal Call to Holiness

39. The Church, whose mystery is being set forth by this Sacred Synod, is believed to be indefectibly holy. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as "uniquely holy," loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her (Eph 5:25f). He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God's glory.

EVERYONE CALLED TO HOLINESS

Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thes. 4:3; cf. Eph. 1:4). However, this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others; in a very special way this (holiness) appears in the practice of the counsels, customarily called "evangelical." This practice of the counsels, under the impulsion of the Holy Spirit, undertaken by many Christians, either privately or in a Church-approved condition or state of life, gives and must give in the world an outstanding witness and example of this same holiness.

JESUS, MODEL OF HOLINESS

40. The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consumator of this holiness of life: "Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mat. 5: 48). Indeed He sent the Holy Spirit upon all men that He might move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength and that they might love each other as Christ loves them.

The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). In this way they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received. They are warned by the Apostle to live "as becomes saints," and to put on "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience," and to possess the fruit of the Spirit in holiness. Since truly we all offend in many things we all need God's mercies continually and we all must daily pray: "Forgive us our debts."

PERFECTION OF THAT LOVE CALLED CHARITY

Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history.



DIFFERENT PATHS TO THE SAME GOAL

41. The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity.

(Source: www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbors, those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence. We might call them "the middle class of holiness."



Let us be spurred on by the signs of holiness that the Lord shows us through the humblest members of that people which "shares also in Christ's prophetic office, spreading abroad a living witness to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity." We should consider the fact that, as Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross suggests, real history is made by so many of them. As she writes: "The greatest figures of prophecy and sanctity step forth out of the darkest night. But for the most part, the formative stream of the mystical life remains invisible. Certainly the most decisive turning points in world history are substantially co-determined by souls whom no history book ever mentions. And we will only find out about those souls to whom we owe the decisive turning points in our personal lives on the day when all that is hidden is revealed."

Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church. But even outside the Catholic Church and in very different contexts, the Holy Spirit raises up "signs of his presence which help Christ's followers." Saint John Paul II reminded us that "the witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants." In the moving ecumenical commemoration held in the Colosseum during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, he stated that the martyrs are "a heritage which speaks more powerfully than all the causes of division."

(A selection from the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis *GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE*, ON THE CALL TO HOLINESS IN TODAY'S WORLD.)

My Prayer for You

Holy God, Father, Son and Spirit, you call each of us to participate in your Divine Life. Help us to strive for perfection without ever thinking that we can achieve this great goal without Your grace. We make this prayer confident that you remain close to us always and that you are ever ready to assist us in our growth toward holiness of life. Amen.

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