

## The Universal Call to Holiness

In the first chapter of his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad), Pope Francis reminds us that God does not call only a select few to holiness, but rather, every person is called to follow his or her own way to holiness. Although we are supported by the communion of saints – those who have passed on to eternal life whom the Church recognizes as good examples of Christian life, as well as those who are still witnessing to Christ in their communities throughout this world – we need not try to copy any one of them, lest we grow discouraged by examples of holiness that appear unattainable.

*The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts, ... rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them. (#11)*

Growing in holiness does not require a life of extensive prayer or grand actions. In even small gestures, we can step closer to God's love. Not engaging in gossip, listening patiently to a child even though one is tired, being kind to a needy person, helping a sick person – all of these are little ways in which we grow in holiness day by day.

*We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. (#14)*

We do not walk our path to holiness on our own. Despite our weaknesses, we can make progress because the Risen Lord shares his powerful life with our fragile ones. And we are part of a faith community whose resources are available to us and to which we ourselves can contribute for others.

*In the Church, holy yet made up of sinners, you will find everything you need to grow towards holiness ... scripture, the sacraments, holy places, living communities, the witness of the saints and a multifaceted beauty that proceeds from God's love. (#15)*

We need to see ourselves as being on a mission – sent by God to reflect Christ in today's world through our words and actions. Don't get caught up in details. Whatever missteps we may take, the entirety of our lives should bear witness to our mission.

*At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord's death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him. (#20)*

*May you come to realize what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed. Let yourself be renewed by the Spirit, so that this can happen. (#24)*

We do not pursue holiness by separating ourselves from others, but rather by integrating the people and actions in our lives with our witness to the love of Christ, so that they become a part of our path to holiness.

*Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace. (#25)*

While we may need times of quiet to reflect and pray, we must not use this as a reason to avoid working with the Holy Spirit to build up the Kingdom of God in our own neighborhoods.

*There are times when we are tempted to relegate pastoral engagement or commitment in the world to second place, as if these were “distractions” along the path to growth in holiness and interior peace. (#27)*

Yet we should also recognize that in a world of constantly new gadgets, an endless array of consumer goods, and the excitement of travel and adventure, we can find ourselves overwhelmed by the increasing noise of superficial pleasures and leave no room for ourselves to hear God’s word.

*Sooner or later, we have to face our true selves and let the Lord enter. (#29)*

*We need a spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelizing efforts, so that every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord’s eyes. In this way, every minute of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness. (#31)*

Holiness is not a threat to our humanity. It will not take us away from the world, but will engage us in transforming our world into God’s Kingdom. Truly being “the salt of the earth, the light of the world” is what the New Evangelization calls us to do.

*Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self. (#32)*

*Do not be afraid ... to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace. (#34)*