

# Signs of Holiness

In the fourth chapter of his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad), Pope Francis highlights five “great expressions of love for God and neighbor” that he considers necessary to understand the way to holiness. (#111)

## **Perseverance / Patience / Meekness**

“The first of these great signs is solid grounding in the God who loves and sustains us.” This source of inner strength helps us both to persevere through ups and downs and to be patient with the failings of others. Thus strengthened, we can “give a witness of holiness through patience and constancy in doing good.” (#112)

“We need to recognize and combat our aggressive and selfish inclinations, and not let them take root.” (#114) Pope Francis warns against getting “caught up in networks of verbal violence through the internet and various forums of digital communication.”

*Limits can be overstepped, defamation and slander can become commonplace, and all ethical standards and respect for the good name of others can be abandoned. (#115)*

Grace-given inner strength prevents us from being carried away by violence and makes possible meekness of heart. Rather than looking down on others, saints consider others better than themselves, and thus show them respect. (#116)

*Humility can only take root in the heart through humiliations. ... The holiness that God bestows on his Church comes through the humiliation of his Son. He is the way. Humiliation makes you resemble Jesus; it is an unavoidable aspect of the imitation of Christ. (#118)*

## **Joy / Sense of Humor**

The Biblical prophets, evangelists and letter-writers regularly noted the joy with which God would fill his people. Rejoice – good tidings – sing for joy: these words describe the response to God’s actions. “That joy brings deep security, serene hope and a spiritual fulfillment that the world cannot understand or appreciate.” (#125)

Our joy should be accompanied by a sense of humor – not getting “so caught up in ourselves that we are unable to recognize God’s gifts.” (#126) This is not the passing joy of consumerism, but a deep, communal joy, enabling us to rejoice in others’ good.

## **Boldness / Passion**

Holiness is *parrhesia* – a Greek word encompassing boldness, fervor, an enthusiasm to evangelize. It accepts Jesus’ admonition to “be not afraid” (Mk 6:50) and enables us to serve with the same courage that the Holy Spirit stirred up in the Apostles. Through it, we feel an inner compulsion to put our lives in the Lord’s service. Despite our perceived weakness, we allow Jesus to send us on mission, as he did his disciples. Apostolic courage is an essential part of mission. *Parrhesia* is a seal of the Spirit, testifying to the authenticity of our preaching and giving us confidence in the Gospel we proclaim.

*We need the Spirit's prompting, lest we be paralyzed by fear and excessive caution, lest we grow used to keeping within safe bounds. (#133)*

*(God) impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond. He takes us to where humanity is most wounded, where men and women, beneath the appearance of a shallow conformity, continue to seek an answer to the question of life's meaning. So if we dare to go to the fringes, we will find him there; indeed, he is already there. (#135)*

*Let us ask the Lord for the grace not to hesitate when the Spirit calls us to take a step forward. Let us ask for the apostolic courage to share the Gospel with others and to stop trying to make our Christian life a museum of memories. (#139)*

## **Community**

Living apart from others makes it easier to lose our sense of inner clarity and succumb to selfishness. (#140)

*Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others. ... Living or working alongside others is surely a path of spiritual growth. (#141)*

*Sharing the word and celebrating the Eucharist together fosters fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community. (#142)*

*The common life, whether in the family, the parish, the religious community or any other, is made up of small everyday things. (#143)*

When we care about one another even in the little details, we create an open and evangelizing environment in which the risen Lord is present, making us holy according to God's plan. (#145)

## **Constant Prayer**

*Finally, though it may seem obvious, we should remember that holiness consists in a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration. ... I do not believe in holiness without prayer, even though that prayer need not be lengthy or involve intense emotions. (#147)*

*Trust-filled prayer is a response of a heart open to encountering God face to face, where all is peaceful and the quiet voice of the Lord can be heard in the midst of silence. In that silence, we can discern, in the light of the Spirit, the paths of holiness to which the Lord is calling us. (#149-150)*

Pope Francis reminds us to let Christ's fire inflame our hearts, so that we can set the hearts of others on fire by our words and witness. (#151) We cannot regard prayerful silence as an escape from the world around us. (#152) Rather, we should remember God's works in our community's experience as well as in our own lives when we pray, so that we may become more aware of his mercy. (#153)

Prayer of supplication is an expression of trust in God and loving concern for our neighbor. We cannot just contemplate God and regard others as an intrusion. (#154)

Our path to holiness necessarily includes the prayerful reading of God's Word and the celebration of Christ's presence there and in the Eucharist, "where the written word attains its greatest efficacy." There we "allow him to carry out ever more fully his work of transforming our lives." (#156-157)