

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- All Christians are called to holiness.
- Growth in holiness is a lifelong pursuit.
- We can overcome obstacles to holiness with the Holy Spirit's help.

Our Call to Holiness

We may squirm uncomfortably at the word *holy*, thinking it applies to our grandma, our parish priest, the pope, or Mother Teresa of Calcutta—but not to *us*. Here's a helpful equation to remember: *holy* ≠ *perfect*.

When Jesus calls disciples, he invites everyone to “the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [*Lumen Gentium*], 40). Becoming holy means that we're in process, growing in intimacy with Christ.

All who are attracted to Jesus Christ have the grandest challenge and opportunity possible: *to become like Christ*.

Jesus said, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6). Yet he offers no instant course in righteousness (holiness). Jesus assures us that holiness can be ours, that blessedness is promised. We have only to desire it. But we must desire it with *all* our hearts, souls, and minds:

“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

Matthew 22:37

- How would you define holiness?
- Who in your life comes to mind when you think of the word *holy*? Why?



All Are Called to Holiness

The Hebrew and Greek roots of the word *holiness* indicate *separateness* and a life that's *set apart* for God. The spiritual progress of one pursuing holiness is marked by an ever-more intimate union with Christ.

A theme running throughout the Second Vatican Council was Christ's call of *all* to a holiness that could take many forms. Whether one is a Carmelite sister or the mother of five, the Spirit provides the grace to accomplish this ultimate, wholehearted fulfillment.

Jesus is made visible in every human being, enlightening all who come into the world. Anyone who pursues good, truth, and beauty is seeking God, who is the source of these things. In each person's unique path to holiness, individual gifts and strengths play a large part.

Yet our holiness isn't solely because of anything we've done or any reward we've earned. The source of our holiness is Christ who sanctified us.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him...to be holy and without blemish before him."

Ephesians 1:3-4

- What seeds of holiness do you see in yourself? What can you do to nurture those seeds for growth?



Me? A Saint?

In the New Testament, the word *saint* is often a synonym for *Christian*. Christians are called to belong to Jesus Christ, to be part of his holy people, to be *saints* (see Romans 1:6-7). In the epistles, Christians are often referred to as "the saints" in a given area.

The saints recognized (canonized) by the Church grew in holiness through the grace and mercy of God. Their perfecting, or sanctifying, took time and effort.

Loving God above all things and living a life centered on Jesus and the kingdom he preached is possible for each one of us. A saint says, "If I, with all my problems, can do it, with God's help, so can you."

The saints grew as we must grow. Somewhere within them they wanted holiness, and they wanted it very much. Their desire occupied their minds and changed their feelings and thoughts. Their desire was an active force in their daily activities. So they gained holiness and found the blessings of joy and peace that come with it.

Perhaps we need to stop thinking of the saints only as dead people who were perfect. God calls us to become saints, too. It may help us to think of saints as "sinners who keep on trying."

The challenge of the saints is to grow to our fullest Christian humanness. None of us is called to be more than human; but we certainly aren't called to be less. That's what sainthood is about—becoming fully human and our best possible selves, the persons God created us to be.

"Strive...for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

Hebrews 12:14

"This is the will of God, your holiness."

1 Thessalonians 4:3

- Why do many of us downplay our inner goodness?
- How might you shine your light more brightly if you realized you might be the only Bible some people will ever read?



Renewing Our Hearts and Minds

Jesus repeatedly tells us that it's our inner thoughts that matter, not just our external actions. The external is always powered from within:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean."

Matthew 23:25-26

If we truly want holiness, we'll fill our thoughts with it. We'll ponder its beauty. We'll long for its results. We'll encourage every thought that leads toward holiness. When holiness is our desire, it will become embodied in our everyday living.



If our minds and lives are cluttered with things that either don't lead us toward holiness or actually lead us away from it, holiness will have little room to grow.

Using the body as a powerful figure of speech (not to be taken literally), Jesus tells us to rid ourselves of everything that stands in the way of our pursuit of holiness:

"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away....And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away."

Matthew 5:29–30

- Name something that gets in the way of your desire for holiness.



Goodness doesn't force itself upon us. Sometimes, we must purge things that become distractions in this journey to personal sanctification. When we take a trip, we want to get to a particular place. But if we take every side road we see along the way, we may never arrive. The same is true of our path to holiness. If we meander through all the distracting paths of life, we may miss the path that will lead us to the joy God desires for us.

"All holiness consists in the love of God; but the love of God consists in conformity to the will of God; therefore, all holiness consists in conformity to the will of God."

St. Alphonsus Liguori

- What do you have on your schedule this week? How can you turn those events into opportunities to grow in holiness?



The Narrow Gate

Jesus didn't tell us that becoming holy would be easy. He emphasized that it's difficult—so much so that many don't choose to reach for it:

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few."

Matthew 7:13–14

Somewhere within each of us, there's a tiny opening. It's hidden, but there's a way to find it. That way will be rough, but we can traverse it. Through that opening is wholeness of life, fullness of loving, fullness of peace, fullness of joy. We can have it. It's our birthright as children of God.

We can find the way and get past the obstacles of the clutter of our inner selves. We can follow the path from the opening into life. That path isn't wide and obvious, but it's there. It begins right where we are at this moment. It's peeking out from beneath and around the boulders of our distractions, mistakes, and sin.

No circumstance can keep us from holiness if we choose to enter by way of the narrow gate! For many adventures, we might need money, equipment, freedom from family responsibilities, physical stamina, or something else we don't have. But for holiness, we need only desire it and accept the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised:

"Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you....Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete."

John 16:23–24

- In what way can the path to holiness be an adventure?



Awaken Your Desire for Holiness

- **Pray.** There's never any substitute for prayer. Ask God to create in you a desire for holiness, for God and his kingdom, a desire strong enough to start you on your own path toward holiness. This is one request God will surely answer in the affirmative!
- **Take Action.** Take some definitive action toward desiring holiness. It could be a public announcement to your friends, breaking a bad habit, giving away something that's too important to you, making a change in your lifestyle or the way you do your job. Whatever it is, do it openly to provide momentum to your desire, to feed and strengthen it.
- **Ponder.** Ponder the advantages of holiness: blessedness; blissfulness; joy; peace; release from fear and worry; freedom to love and be loved without hindrance.

Make two lists.

1. List the difficulties you're facing now: fear; anxiety; conflict with your spouse, a grown child, or a coworker; confusion of priorities; worry about job or finances.
2. List the benefits holiness offers in the face of your difficulties: peace, security with God, at-oneness with self and others, clarity of purpose and direction, freedom to love, confidence and trust in God's care.

Choose holiness!

- *How can I feed my hunger for wholeness and holiness?*
- *How will I overcome the obstacles that keep me from embracing a life of holiness?*



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