

LEADERSHIP FORMATION

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HOLINESS: THE NEW CHALLENGE FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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TEACHING OUTLINE

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1. Holiness is our Vocation

Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium* asserts, "All the Christian faithful, of whatever state or rank, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (40). This is but a faint echo of the imperatives that we read in Sacred Scriptures: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2); "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48); and "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess 4:3).

"The fullness of the Christian life" and "perfection of charity" are supposed to be the end-result of Baptism by which we are initiated into the life of God. To be baptized is to enter into a life of the thrice-holy God. To be baptized is to be ushered into union with the ever-loving God. To be baptized, therefore, is an invitation - a call to us by God to his life that is holy and perfect in a loving fellowship with him... "to be holy and blameless before him in love" (Eph 1:4).

2. Holiness is fellowship with God

What is holiness? In its deepest sense, holiness is a loving fellowship with the all-holy God, the Father, the Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Holiness or righteousness is maintaining a right relationship with God. "And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3). "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever" (Jn 14:15). When, therefore, I am in loving relationship with the Persons of the most Holy Trinity, daily striving to walk always in God's presence, and to remain faithful to his word, I can truly say that I am becoming holy.



3. Intimacy with the Father

As a child, I can relate with God as my Father. "But you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:15-16). Indeed, I am a child of my Father. Here holiness consists in being convinced of this truth, and simply living this fact of my being a child of my Father. I know that my Father loves me tremendously, unconditionally, without reservations, and without limits. I rejoice in this fact. I know that I am always in the loving embrace of my Father, no matter what. "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands" (Is 49:15-16).

As a child - nay, as a tiny infant in his arms, all I can do is bask in his love, open myself to his words of endearment, and receive all the signs and actions of his caring love that provides for all my needs everyday. "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (Mk 10:15). In response to this love of my Father, all I need to do is to cultivate a constant awareness of his all-embracing presence, to offer him everything of my day to his praise and glory, to call on him always in all the circumstances of my daily life, and to smile always, for I always have reason to rejoice in his tremendous love.

4. Following Jesus Christ

As a younger brother/sister, I can relate with Jesus Christ, the Son. In the Family of God into which I was born through Baptism, I can become holy, not only by accepting Jesus Christ as my loving Saviour, and by submitting myself under his Lordship, but also by simply following in his footsteps as a good disciple. "If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples" (Jn 8:31). Daily I make it a point to listen to his words in Sacred Scriptures, to act on them, and to live day by day under his divine tutorship.

How can I love my Father? By imitating the loving ways of Jesus. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). How can I please my Father? By following the example of Jesus. "I always do what is pleasing to him" (Jn 8:29). How can I become holy like my Father? By fixing my eyes on Jesus, "who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection" (Heb 12:2) in the Father. "No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him" (Jn 14:6-7). How can I become

intimate with the Father? By keeping close to Jesus. "No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27).

5. Living in the Holy Spirit

As a close companion, I can relate with the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete who dwells in me, and who makes me the temple of the living God. "If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him, and make our home with him" (Jn 14:23). "Your body, you know, is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you since you received him from God" (1 Cor 6:19). The indwelling Paraclete (Companion, Consoler, Advocate, Intercessor, Helper) is holy, and in fact, through Baptism and Confirmation, he makes my body, mind and spirit holy too.

Furthermore, besides just being a passive receptacle of God's love that "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom 5:5), by the power of the same Holy Spirit, I must respond to God's love by striving daily to "live by the Spirit," be "led by the Spirit," and "also be guided by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16, 18, 25) in all my undertakings and in my relationships with others. In this way, my life would be transformed gradually from "the works of the flesh" to "the fruit of the Spirit, [which] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:19,22-23).

6. Witnessing to God's Love

Living by the Spirit day by day, I then become a vibrant witness of the presence, power and love of God in the world: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). A holy life, therefore, means that my actions are inspired and urged by the Spirit; that my behavior is impelled and empowered by the Spirit; and that my conduct towards others is energized by the Spirit and motivated solely by the love of God. "You must give up your old way of life; you must put aside your old self, which gets corrupted by following illusory desires. Your mind must be renewed by a spiritual revolution so that you can put on the new self that has been created in God's way, in the goodness

and holiness of the truth" (Eph 4:22-24). "Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1). "Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct" (1 Pet 1:16).

7. Holiness is an Attitude

The new challenge of holiness, therefore, is first of all an active relationship in love with the Triune God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is relating with the Father as a little child, with the Son Jesus Christ as a true disciple, and with the Holy Spirit as a constant companion living in his holy presence. Once this attitude towards a personal God is in place, then follow the corresponding words and actions, revealing the holiness of God shining through one's daily life. Simply put, holiness is therefore a habitual attitude and tightly clinging to the God of love. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (read: right relationship with him), and all things will be given to you" (Mt 6:33).

In concrete terms, it simply means, first of all, my being aware of God's loving presence in me and around me.

Then, I offer to him all that I am, all that I have, and all that I do throughout the day. In every circumstance of my daily life, especially in times of need and trouble, I call on him always. And finally, smilingly I rejoice always in him. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!" (Phil 4:4). When I consistently do these simple steps, little by little I grow to become a living saint!

Conclusion: God's Challenge Today

In this new millennium, these parting words of Moses to the People of Israel may be regarded as a challenge to us today: "Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Deut 30:19-20). In this new millennium, let's all strive to become holy within our families and faith communities, clinging to our God who is ever faithful in his love for each and every one of us. 



Questions for discussion

1. What is holiness for you? Do you consider it a way of living your life or are its demands too high?
2. How is your relationship with the three Persons of the Holy Trinity?
3. What are the difficulties that keep you from living continuously in God's presence? What can you do to get over these difficulties?