

DO NOT BE AFRAID OF HOLINESS!

There is a story of a young boy and his mother who were in one of Europe's ancient cities, exploring the majestic cathedrals built many centuries ago, but containing the beauty of sacred art, architecture and statuary, murals and stained glass windows. The young boy was quiet awe and wonder as he gazed around the nave. He looked up at stained glass windows, the refracted light streaming through them and asked his mother, "Mother, what are those?" His mother replied, "They are stained glass windows and on the windows are saints." Then she asked her son, "Do you know who saints are?" Continuing to gaze up at the windows, their beauty, their sacredness, he answered, "Saints are people who let the line shine through."

Saints are people who let the light shine through! What a simple yet profound way of explaining sanctity or holiness. It is profound because it gets to the essence of what it means to become a saint. Becoming a saint is not about us, what we accomplish in a worldly sense. We cannot, from our own merit or strength or know-how, achieve sanctity. It is all about what God does to us and what he does through us.

By virtue of identifying ourselves as Christian, we are all called to take up the call to holiness. All of us! This is what our baptism calls out from us. To be able to say with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live, not I, but Christ who lives in me; who loved me and died for me."

Why do I draw our attention to holiness? We cannot call ourselves disciples and ignore the call to holiness. You cannot have one without the other.

As you have heard, I hope, we at St. Patrick's are facing a new chapter in our parish history. We are different from who were a year ago. Much of our former parish boundary has been carved out to establish Blessed Frederic Ozanam Parish. People have left our parish to begin the process of building a new parish. This has left us with new opportunities. We need to ask ourselves, who and what is St. Patrick's Parish. We need to ask the Lord what does He want for our parish. Indeed, we have been praying for to the Lord that he lead, bless and guide us we discern his vision for the future of our parish. This discernment is not about just re-organizing ourselves, or finding new replacements for ministry positions, or becoming a more efficient or financially stream-lined community. These are all good but it does not get to the heart of the matter. In praying, in meeting with a group of people to discern the direction the Lord is calling us, it is clear that the Lord wants to renew us. We need to undergo a spiritual renewal where we re-commit ourselves to putting Christ at the very centre of all that we are and all that we do. This is none other than a call to grow in holiness. Are you up for this challenge? The Lord is calling each of us to a renewed life of holiness. This is not new! This has been the call of the very first Christians. There can be no parish renewal if it is not solidly grounded in a desire in each of our hearts to grow in holiness.

Just this Spring our Holy Father , Pope Francis, has given the faithful an exhortation, a long letter that calls us too... yes, you got it! Holiness! This is not a treatise of or a doctrinal teaching. This is our chief pastor, our shepherd nudging with his staff, proposing to us that there is great nourishment to be had in the pastures of Christian holiness. Holiness is for ordinary sheep like you and me. Holiness is not the

sole purvey of great saints and mystics or heroic martyrs. Holiness is for each and every baptized Christian. So Pope Francis says loud and clear: DO NOT BE AFRAID OF HOLINESS. He tells us this because if we are honest with ourselves we are often scared of holiness and the demands that we perceive it makes on us or the associations we make with that word.

Three “fears” we might have of holiness:

We associate sanctity with those “holier than thou” people. The people who have a veneer of religiosity, but it is only skin deep. We do not want to be associated with that and rightly so. These were precisely the people that Jesus was warning against in the Gospel today. When we see the hypocrisy in this surface lifestyle, we want nothing of it. This only gives religion a bad rap in the end.

We might associate sanctity with giving up something that we are greatly attached to: if I give that up and begin to live my life centred in Christ, my life will collapse. Again, my life will be lacking, it will lose its fun, its excitement. I will lose those things that I hold dear to my heart. I cannot, and frankly I just do not want to make changes in my life. Like St. Augustine: Lord, make me chaste, but not just yet.

Finally, we associate sanctity with heroes who are way beyond us. I am just an ordinary guy or gal. I work hard to keep a roof over our family’s head, to make ends meet. I would rather just leave the demands of holiness to the saints – John Paul II, Mother Teresa, San Lorenzo, St. Patrick, St. Andre Bessette. We look at the mountain, at the radical demands of the Gospel and we think it is all up to us, and we say there is no way I am going to climb that mountain so why even bother trying...

This is precisely why Pope Francis has written his letter to us. Holiness is for all of us. It is found precisely in the ordinary, everyday, hum-drum rhythms and routines of our lives! Holiness is simply found in the duty of the moment. It is making those little decisions in our day to simply let the light of Christ shine through our actions and our motives and our relationships. For example, as the Pope writes, it is finding ourselves in a conversation that is sliding into gossip. Instead of continuing the slide, we put the brakes on, we change the topic or we politely excuse ourselves from the conversation. That is growth in holiness.

This September, all 5 Sundays focus on theme of the call to holiness. More specifically, we will keep proposing that there is no need to be afraid of holiness. We will walk through the 5 short chapters of Pope Francis’ exhortation, “Rejoice and Be Glad!”

Chapter One (September 1/2 – Fr. Dominic)

- Do not be afraid to see how holiness is found in the very stuff of our everyday lives – in its struggles and in its joys

Chapter Two (September 8/9) – Deacon Michael Hayes

- Do not be afraid to address the two false forms of holiness – reliance on human intellect; reliance on human will power

Chapter Three (September 15/16 – Deacon Mike Walsh)

- Do not be afraid to live the teachings of Jesus as found in the Beatitudes and Matthew 25

Chapter Four (September 22/23 – Fr. Gerald)

- Do not be afraid to be a sign of God's holiness in the world

Chapter Five (September 29/30)

- Do not be afraid to take up the struggle against evil in the world

I end with a quote from Pope Francis' exhortation:

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. To depend on God sets us free from every form of enslavement and leads us to recognize our great dignity.... Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, 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. For in the words of León Bloy, when all is said and done, "the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint". (paragraph 32&34)

Come and join us on the journey. Let Christ's line shine through you and become a saint.