

REJOICE AND BE GLAD: CHAPTER 4: SIGNS OF HOLINESS IN TODAY'S WORLD

In Chapter Four, Pope Francis speaks of the signs of holiness in the world. He calls them five great expressions of love for God and neighbour that he considers of particular importance in the light of certain dangers and limitations present in today's culture. [111] These five expressions of love for God and neighbour are: perseverance, patience, and meekness; joy and a sense of humor; boldness and passion; involvement in community; and constant prayer.

Francis insists on the need for holiness in all parts of our lives, including online: "Christians too can be caught up in networks of verbal violence through the internet and the various forums of digital communication." "Even in Catholic media," he says, "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]

One sign of holiness, Francis says, is "joy and a sense of humor." "This is not the joy held out by today's individualistic and consumerist culture. Consumerism only bloats the heart. It can offer occasional and passing pleasures, but not joy." Pope Francis speaks here "of a joy lived in communion, which shares and is shared, since 'there is more happiness in giving than in receiving' (Acts 20:35) and 'God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Cor 9:7)." [128]

Another sign of holiness consists in "boldness and passion," in an "impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world" and in not allowing oneself to be paralyzed by fear. He told believers that "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...God is not afraid! He is fearless! He is always greater than our plans and schemes. Unafraid of the fringes, he himself became a fringe. So, if we dare to go to the fringes, we will find him there; indeed, he is already there." [135]

"When we live apart from others, it is very difficult to fight against concupiscence, the snares and temptations of the devil and the selfishness of the world. Bombarded as we are by so many enticements, we can grow too isolated, lose our sense of reality and inner clarity, and easily succumb." Francis writes, "a community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father's plan." [145] "Contrary to the growing consumerist individualism that tends to isolate us in a quest for well-being apart from others, our path to holiness can only make us identify all the more with Jesus' prayer 'that all may be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you' (Jn 17:21)." [146]

The final sign of holiness is "constant prayer," the pope writes, describing holiness as "a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration." Francis says, "I do not believe in holiness without prayer, even though that prayer need not be lengthy or involve intense emotions." [147] "If we realize that God exists, we cannot help but worship him, at times in quiet wonder, and praise him in festive song. We thus share in the experience of Blessed Charles de Foucauld, who said: 'As soon as I believed that there was a God, I understood that I could do nothing other than to live for him.'" [155]

Pope Francis tells us that "meeting Jesus in the Scriptures leads us to the Eucharist, where the written word attains its greatest efficacy, for there the living Word is truly present. In the Eucharist, the one true God receives the greatest worship the world can give him, for it is Christ himself who is offered. When we receive him in Holy Communion, we renew our covenant with him and allow him to carry out ever more fully his work of transforming our lives." [157]

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