

INTRODUCTION



Life does not have a mission. Life IS a mission.

“Rejoice and be glad!” This is the title and theme of Pope Francis’s latest apostolic exhortation, released to the faithful on April 9, 2018. Its subtitle, “On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World,” sums up not only the focus of the document but Francis’s overall message to the Church. Throughout his papacy, the pope has stressed the joyfulness of our faith and the trust and confidence God has in us to carry out our baptismal mission. “The Lord has chosen us ‘to be holy and blameless before him in love,’” Pope Francis says, and to help us grasp this, he offers us this reflection on holiness in today’s world and how to achieve it in our daily lives. He says his “modest goal” is to make the pursuit of holiness practical, with all the “risks, challenges, and opportunities” such a call represents for us.

May these thirty reflections on Pope Francis’s words help you to recognize and embrace the holiness that already resides within you, ready to be unleashed by the Holy Spirit!

The quotes from Pope Francis were chosen by Deborah McCann, who also wrote the reflections and the “Ponder” and “Pray” pieces.

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1 | DO NOT BE AFRAID

Do not be afraid of holiness. It will not take away any of your energy, vitality, or joy.

Pope Francis has always been a master of getting to the heart of things. Here he addresses our basic fear that responding to the Lord's call will distract and deplete us of the energy we need for...what? What is it that we are pursuing with such zeal that we need to marshal our forces and hoard our vitality? No, says the pope, by working toward holiness we will become what God has always meant us to be—saints! This is what our baptism marked us for. Let us not be afraid of the happiness that is to be found by serving others—let us pray for the Spirit's guidance that we may embrace it wholeheartedly!

PONDER

What am I afraid of when I think of being holy?

PRAY

God of joy and gladness, fill me with the desire to serve you, and take away my fear.

2 | HOLY? WHO, ME?

Holiness means living our lives with love and bearing witness to the gospel in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves.

Pope Francis first disabuses us of any misconceptions we may have about who is holy. You don't have to be a bishop, a priest, or a religious. Holiness is not limited to those who are cut off from everyday activities and devoted to a life of cloistered prayer. The pope looks instead to parents, grandparents, teachers—all whose mission in life is to witness love to others. Very often, he says, holiness is found in our next-door neighbor, in people who reflect Christ by the way they live. They can be very good models for us, those he calls “the middle class of holiness.”

PONDER

Do I know someone I consider holy? What makes that person special?

PRAY

God of joy and gladness, help me to seek out good models to follow.

3 | YES, YOU!

The Lord addresses this call of holiness to each of us, the call that he also addresses, personally, to you: “Be holy, for I am holy.”

We are all called to perfect holiness, but we are imperfect people. Yet, says Pope Francis, God makes it clear that we are called as we are, at whatever stage of faith we find ourselves, and God gives each of us the marvelous opportunity to grow in the Spirit. Each one of us has been uniquely fashioned by God’s grace to witness his love in the world. Our job is to respond to that call, to put ourselves in God’s hands, to allow ourselves to trust in the Spirit’s power so that we will be fully equipped to be agents of God’s mercy and love wherever we go, and with everyone we meet.

PONDER

Am I ready to trust God and God’s call?

PRAY

God of joy and gladness, erase my doubts and give me the courage to do your will joyfully.

4 | YOU ARE NOT ALONE

*In the Church, holy yet made up of sinners,
is found everything you need to grow in holiness.*

Pope Francis is very aware of our human failings and frailties. In fact, he identifies himself first and foremost as a sinner. But he still trusts that God will work in him and through him. He says, “When you feel the temptation to dwell on your own weakness, raise your eyes to Christ crucified and say: ‘Lord, I am a poor sinner, but you can work the miracle of making me a little bit better.’” In this way, we can begin to live the grace of our baptism and start down the path of holiness. And the Church, in the sacraments, in the Scriptures, in the witness of the faithful, is there to guide us and nourish us.

PONDER

Do I turn everything over to God, my doubts, my fears?

PRAY

God of joy and gladness, help me always to turn to you without fear and with total conviction.

5 | A MULTIFACETED MISSION

We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness.

Pope Francis advises us to look to the witness of the saints, both canonized and those perhaps sitting in the next pew at Mass, but not to be dismayed or discouraged if our own path to witness doesn't mirror theirs. We have each been called to demonstrate Christ's love in our own ways. "The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts (cf. 1 Cor 12:7), rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them," he says. What confidence God has in us! What confidence do we place in God?

PONDER

How well do I know my own gifts?

PRAY

God of joy and gladness, help me to discern the gifts I have that will best serve you.

6 | WHAT IS HOLINESS?

At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life.

Trying to emulate Jesus in our quest to embrace holiness may seem an impossible task. But, says Pope Francis, as always, it helps to look at the details rather than just the big picture. Perhaps some of us are called to relate to the outcast as Jesus did, or to embrace poverty as he did, or to find ways to live in community as he did—each of us in some way can find something in Jesus’ life that we can follow. The pope, quoting the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, says, “Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us.” Again, the pope stresses that we are not alone. Jesus is with us.

PONDER

How do I reflect the face of Jesus in my daily life?

PRAY

God of joy and gladness, remove all the blinders I have to recognizing your presence and guiding spirit, so that I may reflect your goodness.