

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: « The Call to Holiness in Today's World »

In the month of November, we propose working together on some excerpts from Pope Francis' Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, on the call to holiness in today's world. This exhortation will show us that we are all called to holiness.

Recall: A spirit of prayer heralds a good encounter, and a good preparation promotes a communal experience. At the meeting, having a copy of the Holy Scriptures, the Rule and the General Constitutions, will provide clarity and depth for our edification and experience.

Good preparation – Good reflection

NOVEMBER 2018 MONTHLY MEETING

Introduction

What follows is not meant to be a treatise on holiness, containing definitions and distinctions helpful for understanding this important subject, or a discussion of the various means of sanctification. My modest goal is to re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities. For the Lord has chosen each one of us “to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1:4).

The Saints who encourage and accompany us

The Letter to the Hebrews presents a number of testimonies that encourage us to “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (12:1). It speaks of Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Gideon and others (cf. 11:1-12:3). Above all, it invites us to realize that “a great cloud of witnesses” (12:1) impels us to advance constantly towards the goal. These witnesses may include our own mothers, grandmothers or other loved ones (cf. 2 Tim 1:5). Their lives may not always have been perfect, yet even amid their faults and failings they kept moving forward and proved pleasing to the Lord.

Each of us can say: “Surrounded, led and guided by the friends of God... I do not have to carry alone what, in truth, I could never carry alone. All the saints of God are there to protect me, to sustain me and to carry me”.

Reflection:

After reading this paragraph, share examples of holiness that you have known or encountered in your family, friends and neighbourhood. (About 15 minutes)

The Saints “Next Door”

Nor need we think only of those already beatified and canonized. The Holy Spirit bestows holiness in abundance among God’s holy and faithful people, for “it has pleased God to make men and women holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather as a people who might acknowledge him in truth and serve him in holiness”. In salvation history, the Lord saved one people. We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual. Rather, God draws us to himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in a human community. God wanted to enter into the life and history of a people.

I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God’s people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence. We might call them “the middle class of holiness”.

Let us be spurred on by the signs of holiness that the Lord shows us through the humblest members of that people which “shares also in Christ’s prophetic office, spreading abroad a living witness to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity”. We should consider the fact that, as Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross suggests, real history is made by so many of them. As she writes: “The greatest figures of prophecy and sanctity step forth out of the darkest night. But for the most part, the formative stream of the mystical life remains invisible. Certainly the most decisive turning points in world history are substantially co-determined by souls whom no history turning points in our personal lives on the day when all that is hidden is book ever mentions. And we will only find out about those souls to whom we owe the decisive revealed”.

Reflection and Sharing:

Take the time to read the preceding paragraph, then share links that could help us see the saints next door. Take the necessary time so that the members may express their thoughts.

The Lord calls

All this is important. Yet with this Exhortation I would like to insist primarily on the call to holiness that the Lord addresses to each of us, the call that he also addresses, personally, to you: “Be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44; cf. 1 Pet 1:16). The **Second Vatican Council** stated this clearly: “Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever

their condition or state, are called by the Lord – each in his or her own way – to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect”.

... There are some testimonies that may prove helpful and inspiring, but that we are not meant to copy, for that could even lead us astray from the one specific path that the Lord has in mind for us. 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. We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness.

This should excite and encourage us to give our all and to embrace that unique plan that God willed for each of us from eternity: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (Jer 1:5).

Reflection:

Having read the paragraph above, do you agree with what is presented as the means of discovering the way to holiness. If yes, why? If not, explain your thought.

For you too

We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by labouring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain.

Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to him in every situation. Do not be dismayed, for the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (cf. Gal 5:22-23). 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 the Church, holy yet made up of sinners, you will find everything you need to grow towards holiness. The Lord has bestowed on the Church the gifts of scripture, the sacraments, holy places, living communities, the witness of the saints and a multifaceted beauty that proceeds from God’s love, “like a bride bedecked with jewels” (Is 61:10).

Sharing:

Share your thoughts on the content of these two paragraphs. Take the necessary time to allow all the members to share their thoughts

Deepening points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions

Rule Article 5

Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. The faith of Saint Francis, who often said “I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except his most holy body and blood”, should be the inspiration and pattern of their Eucharistic life.

General Constitutions Article 9.1

The spirituality of the secular Franciscan is a plan of life centered on the person and on the following of Christ, rather than a detailed program to be put into practice .

Biblical Reflection:

Read the Gospel of Sunday or the Gospel of the day.

Share your thoughts on this gospel, using the following questions:

1. To whom does it speak? What does it teach us?
2. How does it reach us personally?
3. Is it a message of hope? Another kind of message? How and why?

In the Footsteps of Francis

(Excerpt from the 2nd Letter to the Faithful, verses 51-52, Écrits Claire et François, Éditions du Cerf, Paris 2003)

We are spouses when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united to Jesus Christ. We are truly brothers when we do the will of his Father who is in heaven.

Life-Objective

During the month of November, take a moment to notice the saints in our family circle, these men and women who are witnesses of the holiness of God ...

Events and information from the Church and the Order

Recall the local and regional meetings and activities.

End of the meeting: (song or prayer chosen by the fraternity)

At home

Take the time to read a book, or at least a few passages of the life of a saint in the Franciscan Order.