

4

Signs of Holiness in Today's World

OPENING PRAYER

O God who makes all things new, open our hearts and minds as we come together to reflect on your call to practice holiness in our daily lives. Help us to hear and to respond to you in our daily lives. May we learn in this time of prayer how to be more loving toward you, others and ourselves. Moreover, may we learn to trust in your abundant love for us and all of your creation, and inspire us to be a witness of your love to others.

SIGNS OF HOLINESS

Using the Beatitudes and Matthew 25:31-46 as the basis for a life of holiness, Pope Francis presents five signs of holiness which he describes as “five great expressions of love for God and neighbour... in the light of certain dangers and limitations present in today’s culture.” These five signs contrast present dangers such as “anxiety... sullenness; the self-content bred by consumerism; individualism” and various forms of “ersatz spirituality”. The five signs are: (1) Perseverance, patience and meekness; (2) Joy and a sense of humour; (3) Boldness and passion; (4) In community; and (5) In constant prayer.

FIVE SIGNS OF HOLINESS

1 Perseverance, patience, and meekness (GE 112-121)

“The first of these great signs is solid grounding in the God who loves and sustains us. This source of inner strength enables us to persevere amid life’s ups and downs, but also to endure hostility, betrayal and failings on the part of others.”

Pope Francis recognises that we live in a world that is “fast-paced, noisy, and aggressive”. He says that **“through patience and constancy in doing good”**, we can communicate a contrasting message. That is, we can show God’s fidelity of love to all of us by our fidelity of love towards others; by never giving up on them especially when they experience “anxiety and distress”.



It is easy to be caught up in subtle forms of violence because of our aggressive and selfish inclinations, through seeking revenge, acting in anger, verbal violence towards others through various forms of communications, lying, or looking down on others and judging them.

As an antidote, Pope Francis tells us to turn to the words of St John of the Cross who says: “Always prefer to be taught by all, rather than to desire teaching even the least of all... Rejoice in the good of others as if it were your own, and desire that they be given precedence over you in all things; this you should do wholeheartedly.”

Ultimately, we need to realise that without humility, we will not be on a path to holiness. Humility is being grounded in who you really are, and avoiding egotism.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION:

- Q. How aware are you of ‘subtle forms of violence’ in the world around you? What expression might these take?
- Q. In what way do you try to live humbly in your life? How can you grow in this endeavour?

2 Joy and a sense of humour (GE 122-128)

“Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the Saints are joyful and full of good humour.” Pope Francis challenges Christians to be joyful rather than appearing as someone who has just returned from a funeral. As he once said: “If you have a face of a funeral wake, how can they believe that you are



redeemed, that your sins have been forgiven?”

Pope Francis points out that the Christian life in fact is “joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17), for the necessary result of the love of charity is joy...” Mary, the model of discipleship, herself begins the Magnificat with: “My Soul proclaims your greatness, O my God, and my spirit has rejoiced in you, my Saviour.” The Magnificat is not just a song of praise. Rather it also expresses a deep trust in the God of mercy and justice, who acts in history to save us all.

Even when difficulties arise, we retain our “deep security” and “serene hope” in this salvation history, for it tells us that the cross and death do not have the last say. Pope Francis says himself: “Hard times may come, when the Cross casts its shadow, **yet nothing can destroy the supernatural joy that ‘adapts and changes, but always endures**, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.”

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION:

- Q. What are the sources of deep joy for you? Do you recognise this is God at work in your life?
- Q. In times of difficulty is there a text or a practice which helps you to remember God’s infinite love for you?

3 Boldness and passion (GE 129 -139)

If God has done great things for us, why would we not proclaim it to the mountain tops? In Matthew 5:15 we find: “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.”

We are called to be unafraid to proclaim the Good News of God and proclaim a different narrative to what the world might give us. Where in this world the celebrities, politicians and media moguls define our economies, in God’s world it is the poor, the stranger, the outsider or the marginalised, and forgotten who take priority. We must not be afraid to say that another world is possible and to never grow tired of working towards a world of peace and justice.

Pope Francis points to Jesus himself, saying: “Look at Jesus. His deep compassion reached out to others. It did not make him hesitant, timid or self-conscious, as so often happens with us. Quite the opposite. His compassion made him go out actively to preach and to send others on a mission of healing and liberation. Let us acknowledge our weakness but allow Jesus to lay hold of it and send us too on mission.”

Where should we exercise boldness and passion? Pope Francis says beyond our own comfortable spaces and at the fringes of society: “**...if we dare go to the fringes, we will find [Jesus] there**; indeed, he is already there. Jesus is already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, in their troubles and in their profound desolation. He is already there.” Let us then respond to the Spirit instead of “trying to make Christian life a museum of memories”.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION:

- Q. Describe a time when you acted with passion and boldness in proclaiming the Good News.
- Q. Where are some of the fringes of your society, and is it possible for you to reach out to the people there?

4 In community (GE 140-146)

When we do not live in community “we can grow too isolated, lose our sense of reality and inner clarity, and easily succumb.” True holiness not only leads us to live in community and communion with others but also leads us to be open to other people including those who can be very different to ourselves. For it is in community that we truly learn what it is to love someone, as 1 John 4:7-8 tells us: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” Only in an atmosphere of loving relationships can we be challenged to expand our hearts and minds and grow in the love of God.

Pope Francis tells us “Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others.” This common life with others “whether in the family, the parish, the religious community or any other, is made up of small everyday things.” Those small things make a difference to a life of holiness when they become small acts of love that build trust, hope, and unity in diversity. Particularly, Pope Francis says of the little acts of love: **“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. There are times when, by a gift of the Lord’s love, we are granted, amid these little details, consoling experiences of God.”

**FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION:**

- Q. How has God shown you that you are loved and sustained by God’s love?
- Q. When have you communicated God’s love to someone who was challenging for you?
- Q. What small acts of love do you recognise in your family/community?

5 In constant prayer (GE 147- 177)

This seems obvious and yet it is one of those vital practices that can go by the wayside when our lives are already full and busy. Yet Pope Francis points us to the Saints who found “an exclusive concern with this world to be narrow and stifling, and, amid their own concerns and commitments, they long for God, losing themselves [then] in praise and contemplation of the Lord.”

Prayer is where we can discern our paths of holiness, the Spirit’s promptings. We need to make space for this. Otherwise, “any decisions we make may only be window-dressing that, rather than exalting the Gospel in our lives, will mask or submerge it. For each disciple, it is essential to spend time with the Master, to listen to his words, and to learn from him always. Unless we listen, all our words will be nothing but useless chatter.”

In addition to a time of discernment, prayer can also be contemplation of the face of Jesus, remembrance of God at work in our lives, intercession for those in need and those we love, and worship and praise of God in Word and in Sacrament, especially in the Eucharist where Pope Francis says “...we renew our covenant with God and allow God to carry out ever more fully the work of transforming our lives.”

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION:

- Q. When do you find yourself praying? How much does it affect your life?
- Q. Do you need to commit more time for prayer or action? You may wish to write down your commitment in your journal.

“God comes to us continually”

God comes to us continually...both directly and indirectly. God demands of us both work and pleasure, and wills that each should not be hindered, but rather strengthened, by the other. Thus, the interior person possesses life in both these ways, in activity and in rest. And this person is whole and undivided in each of them, for s/he is entirely in God when s/he joyfully rests and is entirely in him/herself when s/he actively loves.

Q. Do you have a sense of God continually in your life or rather in discreet instances?

Grant me, O Lord, good digestion, and also something to digest. Grant me a healthy body, and the necessary good humour to maintain it. Grant me a simple soul that knows to treasure all that is good and that doesn't frighten easily at the sight of evil, but rather finds the means to put things back in their place. Give me a soul that knows not boredom, grumbling, sighs and laments, nor excess of stress, because of that obstructing thing called 'I'. Grant me, O Lord, a sense of good humour. Allow me the grace to be able to take a joke and to discover in life a bit of joy, and to be able to share it with others".

St Thomas More

- What has spoken to me deeply during this time of prayer?
- How do I see Jesus and my relationship with him differently?
- What is one new insight I have gained about holiness in my life?
- What is one thing I can practice this week as a result of my reflection?

At the end of your journaling time, you may wish to share your insights with each other in the group.



Office for
Evangelisation

CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF
BROKEN BAY