

sort of spiritual reading; the Gospels are a great place to start. A daily examination of conscience also is encouraged so that we may recognize the damage we do in our relationship with God. The saints detest their sins and tirelessly ask for God's merciful assistance to overcome them by his grace.

The saints know the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church. They know the Ten Commandments and the beatitudes. But more than knowing these, they live them. Saints are faithful to the precepts of the Church and liturgical rubrics. They observe the days of fast and abstinence, and even freely incorporate those practices when not obliged. The saints are living icons of the Gospel by living out the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Spiritual direction is a recommended practice for those desiring holiness. Start by asking your parish priest. Many parish priests are quite busy these days, so if he is not able to commit to a regular schedule, he certainly can help you find someone to assist you in your spiritual growth. Join parish groups or studies and make new friends who want to grow in a relationship with God as much as you.

Saints remain faithful to their state in life. Those who want to be holy should accept the work set before them as a gift from God, as an opportunity to share in his creative power. "Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ" (CCC, No. 2427). And saints do not give into the temptation that we need to accomplish the things that the world deems as great. St. Teresa of Calcutta once said: "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love."



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## *Be a Saint*



## Solemnity of All Saints

# Be a Saint

Be a Saint Like the cloud of witnesses in heaven, we are all called to holiness; and through God's mercy, we have the ability to achieve it.

by: Michael R. Heinlein

Many have called All Saints' Day (Nov. 1) the feast for all those holy men and women who enjoy eternity with God in heaven but have not been canonized by the Church. They enjoy the fulfillment of the central and most basic of vocations for Christians: our common call to be saints.

This important truth — that all the baptized are called to holiness — had a resurgence in modern years as one of the primary teachings of the Second Vatican Council. But that was nothing new. In the Gospels, time and again Jesus reiterates this truest calling, particularly with his invitation to “be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48).

What is the perfection to which we are called? Fundamentally, it means we are to imitate Jesus Christ, who is the perfect model for us in living the divine life. The Church exhorts those who desire sanctity to “use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in his footsteps and conform themselves to his image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor” (Lumen Gentium, No. 40).

## A call to love

St. Paul reminds the baptized they have put on Christ (see Gal 3:27). That initiates the lifelong process by which we seek to be characterized by his qualities. St. Paul elaborates on this further by offering what amounts to be his job description of a saint: “Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection” (Col 3:12-14).

Jesus accomplished our salvation with the greatest act of love the world has ever known. When Jesus gave us the perfect image of what love looks like, he challenged us to imitate it: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends” (Jn 15:13). In his sacrifice, Christ models the perfection to which we are called — perfection in charity. Christ's two great commandments form the bedrock

## Evangelical counsels

Although consecrated persons are vowed to a life of poverty, chastity and obedience, these “evangelical counsels” are offered by Christ as a clear-cut way of life for those who wish to follow him. Nonetheless, “the counsels, voluntarily undertaken according to each one's personal vocation, contribute a great deal to the purification of heart and spiritual liberty” (Lumen Gentium, No. 46). “Christ proposes the evangelical counsels, in their great variety, to every disciple” (CCC, No. 915). They are virtues to be appropriated by all Christians who seek holiness.

God is all that matters for the saints — total commitment to the Gospel is essential. Poverty, chastity and obedience are those virtues that free us from the distractions of the world and focus us more readily on the path to eternal life. The way of life demanded by poverty, chastity and obedience illustrate our total commitment to the Christian way. Poverty frees us from humanity's propensity toward material goods. Chastity frees us from humanity's propensity toward fleshly desires. Obedience frees us up to do God's will rather than our own. They all aim at the perfection we seek in holiness, lead us toward the true good and enable us to love more fully. In the freedom to which they lead, we find true joy.

## A spiritual plan

Our call is great. It is no less than to share in the divine life, made possible because of Jesus Christ. And he has called us to follow him in the way of perfection, which is no small thing. We should not be overwhelmed by this, but realize that in God's great love and mercy he desires us completely. He gives us all we need to relinquish the bonds of sin and death and inherit eternal happiness with him.

The key spiritual goal for Christians wanting holiness is to remain in the state of grace. We need God's help to do so, and he makes that grace readily available to us. Those aspiring to sanctity should avail themselves regularly to God's grace available in the sacraments. Frequent reception of holy Communion and sacramental penance is essential.

Making time for daily prayer is crucial for the saints. Make use of traditional prayers that can be said from memory in any place and at any time. The Rosary, the Stations of the Cross and the Angelus are good prayers that focus us on the heart of the Gospel. But it also is important to spend time in private mental prayer, speaking to God from the heart's depths. A perfect place for this is Eucharistic adoration, but a quiet place in your home also is suitable. It's also good to make some time each day for some

## Cardinal Virtues

The human (or cardinal) virtues are stable dispositions of the intellect and the will that govern our acts, order our passions and guide our conduct in accordance with reason and faith.

**Prudence:** Disposes the practical reason to discern, in every circumstance, our true good and to choose the right means for achieving it.

**Justice:** Consists in the firm and constant will to give God and neighbor their due.

**Fortitude:** Ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good.

**Temperance:** Moderates the attraction of the pleasures of the senses and provides balance in the use of created goods.

Source: Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 1834-1838

## Theological virtues

Since all of human behavior should be aimed at being perfect like God, the Catechism describes the human virtues as grounded in the theological virtues. “They inform all the moral virtues and give life to them” (CCC, No. 1841). Faith, hope and charity “dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive and object” (CCC, No. 1812).

## Theological Virtues

There are three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity. They inform all the moral virtues and give life to them.

**By faith:** We believe in God and believe all that he has revealed to us and that Holy Church proposes for our belief.

**By hope:** We desire, and with steadfast trust await from God, eternal life and the graces to merit it.

**By charity:** We love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for love of God. Charity, the form of all the virtues, “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14).

Source: Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 1841-1844

on which should rest all human behavior: love of God and love of neighbor (see Mt 22:36-39). St. John states clearly love’s connection to obedience: “For this is love, that we walk according to his commandments” (2 Jn 1:6).

Following God’s commandments are a path to love, not a list of prohibitions. They are paths to answer a “yes” to God’s will, a “yes” to love God and our brothers and sisters. Sin is love’s absence. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says sin is a “failure in genuine love for God and neighbor” (No. 1849). Obedience to the will of God ultimately leads us to be love for the world — even to the point of total surrender of the self. Each of us is called to find with St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who said: “At last I have found my vocation. In the heart of the Church, I will be love!”

The saints’ hearts full of love have nothing of cynicism or nastiness, nor are they bored or looking for the easy way out. They are given no promise for such. Jesus himself was made “perfect through suffering” (Heb 2:10). In the Gospel, Jesus “said to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me’” (Lk 9:23). Saints suffer like us all, but through the lens of faith they know their suffering has a purpose. They know, with St. Paul, that all things work toward the good (see Rom 8:28).

The love to which we are called is not a simple emotion. Christian love involves a giving heart. This entails giving away everything for the sake of God and others — even when nothing might be returned. In the words of Cardinal Francis E. George, OMI, the late archbishop of Chicago: “The only thing we take with us when we die is what we have given away.” “The only things that endure are our relationships with God and with others,” Cardinal George said, “we give him all that we have, and he takes the gift and calls us when he is ready to do so.”

And so the call to be holy is a call to love. Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium* clearly connects holiness and charity: “all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (No. 40). Living, therefore, means we work to find the joy and happiness for which God has made us. The message of the Gospel is relayed to us by Jesus so that we may have joy to the fullest (see Jn 15:11). “Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!” St. Paul says (Phil 4:4). Our rejoicing manifests itself, he goes on to say, by making our kindness known to all.

## Sanctity is everyone's vocation

Vatican II's teaching on the universal call to holiness reminded the Church that all of us have the common goal of sanctity. None of the baptized are excluded from this call. "The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one" (Lumen Gentium, No 41). In the years following the council, there has been great emphasis on promoting sainthood causes for people from a variety of vocations, ages, places, social classes, etc. "All Christ's faithful, whatever be the conditions, duties and circumstances of their lives — and indeed through all these, will daily increase in holiness, if they receive all things with faith from the hand of their heavenly Father and if they cooperate with the divine will. In this temporal service, they will manifest to all men the love with which God loved the world" (Lumen Gentium, No. 41).

Reiterating this in many ways is the large number of young persons and laypeople who were raised to the altars through beatification or canonization during the pontificate of Pope St. John Paul II. Successive popes have continued with the program of raising the profile of lay canonization causes to reiterate the dignity of their vocation as a means to attain the holiness to which all are called. The year 2008 saw the Church's first joint beatification of a married couple — the holy parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Sts. Louis and Zélie Martin. Together they were canonized in 2015. The youngest nonmartyrs were canonized just this year — the two sibling-seers of Fatima, Sts. Francisco and Jacinta Marto.

## Holiness and virtue

A share in the divine life is our purpose; it is why we have been created. As the old Baltimore Catechism put it for generations of American Catholics: "God made me to know him, to love him and to serve him in this world, and to be happy with him forever in heaven." Or, as the psalmist put it: "As for me, to be near God is my good" (Ps 73:28).

The saint's desire for God is a desire for goodness itself, which must characterize our lives if we desire to become saints. This means forming our lives by the virtues. The Catechism defines virtue as "an habitual and firm disposition to do the good." Virtue "allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions" (CCC, No. 1803).

The practice of the virtues exhibits our dependence on God and is an opportunity to allow God's goodness to shine through us. This has more to do with what is on the inside than what is on the outside, though. The key challenge for the saint is to harmonize all thoughts, words and deeds with the Gospel. We are not called to just be persons of good etiquette, but are called to be focused internally on centering our moral life on Christ himself.

Holiness is associated with virtuous living. St. Gregory of Nyssa said the goal of holiness "is to become like God." As we pursue the life of virtue, we seek to become more Christlike and immerse ourselves more fully into the divine life. Virtuous living means that we work to be better people according to the example of Christ's life — which means we can be described as loving, humble, patient, chaste, generous, etc. It also means that we are ready to do the will of God above all else and we know that God's plans are best for us in the end.

When an individual is identified as having lived a holy life and a cause of canonization is opened, the Church investigates all aspects of their life. A life of virtue — practiced to a heroic degree — is the key component to be identified initially. The Catechism groups virtue into two categories: human and theological.

"The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good" (CCC, No. 1804). The human virtues assist one in living a holy, virtuous life. The practice of the human virtues requires steadfast resolution, and they dispose us toward seeking perfection. They are practiced in such a way that our actions and will are brought into harmony with faith and reason. They enable us to find the joy for which God made us through self-control.

## Cardinal virtues

Traditionally all human virtues pivot upon four main virtues: prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude. St. Ambrose first referred to these as "cardinal" virtues in the fourth century — coming from the Latin "cardo" which means "hinge." Found, too, in Scripture, particularly in the Book of Wisdom (see 8:7), these four virtues appear in ancient philosophy as the guide for those seeking to live a moral life. These "human virtues" are learned through our own education and by persevering in their practice with a dependence on God's grace. "The virtuous man is happy to practice them" (CCC, No. 1810).

The Catechism reminds us that, due to our proclivity toward sin, practice of the human virtues is no easy task. But the grace of Christ's redemptive and salvific sacrifice enables us to pursue them. "Everyone should always ask for this grace of light and strength, frequent the sacraments, cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and follow his calls to love what is good and shun evil" (CCC, No. 1811).