

Homily022617

DO NOT BE AFRAID TO BE HOLY  
(Is holiness only for those known as saints?  
Or is holiness for everyone who lives?)

In the 1950's as an outflow of the Holy Year of 1950, Catholic families worldwide were encouraged to pray together precisely as families. They were encouraged to pray as a family on a daily basis so that each home would become a house of prayer. It is hard to disagree with the simple logic and truth of such a request. One of the simplest prayers was the rosary. It was available even to children and including small children. And so the Family Rosary was born. Our young family decided that we would pray the rosary each day after dinner.

We would go into the living room and we would pray kneeling down. Each parent or child would pick a chair or the sofa and kneel in front of it. In our family the children ranged in age from four years old to thirteen. My parents were in their late 30's. The children took turns with leading each of the decades of the rosary. We had this large rosary that fit inside a large plastic but hollow statue of Our Lady. It was passed from one leader to the next. At first, things worked all right but it is hard on a consistent basis to harness the attention and focus of four young children for fifteen or twenty minutes every day. So there were glances, then corrections which interrupted the praying, then there were threats and finally there were tears. And sometimes many tears. Ultimately the Family Rosary proved to be too much for our little family. Although to this day I will pray the rosary and always when I am driving the car and often asking the passenger to pray it along with me.

Be holy. Be holy. "Do not be afraid to be holy." That is what Our Lord once said to me. Let me ask some questions. Do you think that you can recognize holiness when you see it? How about in yourself? Can you tell? Do you see holiness as a form of piety? It isn't. Do you see holiness as a good thing but beyond you? Do you see it as okay for saints but not for ordinary folk like yourself?

Let me ask some more questions: Why are you so sure that you are not holy? Is it that you are aware of your sins? What if I was to tell you that despite your past sins and despite your present sins that there is something fundamentally good about you? Something fundamentally good in you? Once you recognize this God-given goodness nothing can harm you, nothing can destroy you. Notice: I did not say that nothing can hurt you but rather that nothing can harm you. You are a child of God. You belong to God by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Holiness is not an achievement. Nor is holiness something I earn. Holiness is a gift—and—it is a gift that we have already received. We have only to recognize, believe and accept the gift. But what I have found is that too often my own words

and my own thoughts about myself deny my holiness. Ask yourself if you have ever heard yourself say some of these things or if those close to you have spoken like this.

I am not a very lovable person.

I am such a mess.

I am such a failure.

I'm a lousy sister.

I am not a very good father.

I am way too self-centered.

I am going to burn in hell for being so mean and nasty.

I can't help it—this is just the way I am.

Every one of these statements is a negative statement, personally negative. I am not. I am not. I will burn. I can't help it. But what if? What if we each made an effort, a conscious effort, to affirm the good in us. Can you hear yourself say things such as:

I am truly blessed by God.

God has been very good to me.

I thank God every day for the gift of my faith.

I will keep you in my prayers.

I am a child of God.

I am loved by God.

Christ died for me.

I have a place at his table.

I have been invited to live forever in his kingdom.

I love you Lord.

Is there anyone here this morning who is incapable of saying such things or thinking such things? Any incapable of meaning these things? Be holy. You are holy—already. You are not holy by means of your works but by means of God's gift. Own it. Thank him. You are holy so be holy