**Holiness**

All our readings point us to our identity of being made to be holy. Holiness means to be different from the outside community. Holiness of a parish community means to have a radical difference from the larger cultural community. We are all called to be holy as our heavenly Father is holy. The more we are holy, the more we are conformed to the image of Christ. Through holiness, we become united with Christ in a mystical way. God has laid down a path for us to achieve this height through the sacraments. Through our union with Christ, we become united with the Holy Trinity. Holiness, means to be seen and noticed as followers of God’s commandments of love of God and lone of neighbor.

God has called every one of us to this mystical union with Him through His grace. However, through the Holy Spirit, He gives each one of us different gifts to build His Kingdom on earth. The grace we receive from the Holy Spirit confers on us the righteousness of God. We are united mystically to His Passion and Resurrection by faith and by our being baptized into Christ, making us shares in His life. The manifestation of His grace shows up in our daily lives by having the virtue of patience during trials, rejoicing during the time of sorrow. God wants us to choose holiness and not lawlessness. Or we might ask, what does holiness have in common with darkness? Through our baptism, we have received the grace to be holy.

According to the Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World ***“The blessings of human dignity, brotherly communion and freedom—all the good fruits on earth of man’s co-operation with nature in the Spirit of the Lord and according to his command—will be found again in the world to come, but purified of all stain, resplendent and transfigured, when Christ hands over to the Father an eternal and everlasting kingdom: “a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.” On this earth the kingdom is already present in sign; when the Lord comes it will reach its completion”*** (39). The kingdom of God on earth is His Church.

In our first reading, through Prophet Isaiah, God made a promise to send a Servant who would bring holiness into the world. This Servant would make the glory of God shown to the world.so His people would return to Him who is the source of holiness. The servant would be light from light He will be true God from true God. It is then that they would become holy. God would bless His Servant. He will be their strength. He will take away their uncircumcised hearts of stone and replace them with hearts of flesh. He will take possession of their hearts and dwell in them. He is the pattern of all beauty and holiness who desires to set the seal of His likeness in their hearts.

It is through His Servant that salvation would come into the world. He will be a light to all nations to restore them to how God had created them and He will restore them to what God had in mind for them when He knit them together in the womb. He will reconcile them to God. So amazing is His divine grace that it would elevate them to heights they could never imagine. It would elevate them from the lowest valley to the highest and transform them to greater holiness. They need to remember their garment of holiness which they received from God and allow their breastplate be the knowledge God had given them.

In the letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, that was really a “Sin City” a small but vibrant community. St Paul wrote his first letter of admonition and advice. The community was established in about 51 AD. Paul showed his love for them by caring about their spiritual growth. His word could easily fit our present world that is disturbed by partisan division and rivalry. This first letter addressed to the entire community points to the seriousness both Paul and Sosthenes attached to what was going on within the community. The “you” implied that they were speaking to the entire community. Their admonition was a call to holiness of the entire community.

Holiness means to be different from others. It means to be a shining light in the darkness of the world. It means to keep burning continually the sweet smelling incense of prayer. Let Christ be our helmet. Let us take up the sword of the Spirit, and let our heart be an altar. Then, with full confidence in God, present our body for sacrifice. God desires not death, but faith; God thirsts not for blood, but for self-surrender; God is appeased not by slaughter, but by the offering of our free-will. Our freewill should always be directed towards holiness. It is then we will be that light shining on the top of hill for others to see and desire to be like Christ,

In some part of the Roman Catholic Church, Christmas goes on for 40 days, starting on Christmas Day and ending on February 2nd on Candlemas feast. It speaks volume that our reading today on the baptism of our Lord comes some few days after the birth of our Lord when He was born and laid down in a manger. Today, we heard that our Lord after being baptized by John the Baptist was made known to Israel during His baptism and during the same season of the year when He was born, even though it was about 30 years between the two events. At Christmas he was born a man; today, we are told by John the Baptist that Jesus was reborn sacramentally.

It should be a question in our mind, why would a holy Man the Son of God needed to be baptized! John gave us the answer that he himself came baptizing with water so that Jesus might be made known to Israel. Jesus Christ desired baptism not to be made holy, but to make all water holy for our baptism. John said he did not know Him but, after His baptism, John saw the Holy Spirit came down upon Him, so that was how John knew that Jesus is the Messiah who would baptize humanity with the Holy Spirit as told him by God the Father. So John testified to humanity that Jesus is the Messiah who came to suffer and die so we could be saved and restore our holiness,

As we come to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask Him to open wider the gates of holiness to us.