**“Holiness”**

All our readings point us to the word holiness. Holiness is demanded of those who aspire to see God. Although holiness like all good things are a gift from God and not achieved by our own efforts alone, it can be a goal desired by every human being who seriously prepare themselves to receive it. To be holy means to be different from others. By the difference, others would see in the person the virtues bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit. Virtues such as gentleness, disdain of anger, envy, or greed. Though we are not to act in such a way as to only want others to notice these gifts, our gifts will have the effect on others when they are genuine and sincere before God.

The fruit of the Holy Spirit which are derived from the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, leads to holiness or perfection according to Scripture as listed in the Tradition of the Church. They are, **“charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity”** (Gal 5:22-23). These virtues lead us to do good. They become habits that are natural to us or become part of us and people will notice them in us. Moved by the Spirit, they would desire to be like us because of the peace and joy that comes from God we would radiate. God uses these virtues to mold us to be the people He wanted us to be.

Our holiness will not be perfected until we get to heaven and we see the face of God. We would have been cleansed from any attachment we might have to things on earth which are not good for our salvation. According to the Second Vatican Council Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium), “***The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus and in which we acquire holiness through the grace of God, will reach its perfection only in the glory of heaven, when the time comes for the renewal of all things, and the whole world, which is intimately bound up with man and reaches its perfection through him, will, along with the human race, be perfectly restored in Christ.”***

God has saved us through the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ so we can become holy. Christ took upon His body our sin and was nailed to the cross so that we might die to sin and live for holiness. He has called us to live a life of virtue and holiness. Our holiness and salvation does not come from anything we could do, but according to His own plan and by His own grace. All we have to do is follow His commandments of love of God and love of our neighbor for the sake of God. If we run the race perfectly, a crown of holiness awaits us in heaven where we and all the saints will perfectly adore and worship God the Trinity.

In our first reading, we heard God tell us in the Book Leviticus the things that keep us from holiness. The first is ***hatred*** for our brothers and sisters. When we have hatred in our hearts, the grace of God will not come into our evil clogged heart. It is when we have love and desire heaven for our neighbor that we will be free to receive the grace of God through the Holy Spirit that would give us all the virtues we need to be holy as our heavenly Father is holy. Love of God and love of neighbor leads to holiness. Part of being holy is reproving with love and compassion our brothers and sisters we notice might be going astray or falling away from the ways of God.

Secondly, to be holy, we are not to take ***revenge*** when we are wronged by our neighbor. Taking revenge against those who wrong us means we wish evil against them. We forget that we too are not innocent and we do offend others. We must remember that God said somewhere in Scripture that vengeance is His. He is the God of justice who knows all and would judge us perfectly. The third key word is ***grudge***, when we keep a grudge, we are the only one who knows about it. The person we are angry at does not know that we are mad at them. As I heard it explained one day, it is like drinking a poison and hoping the other person get sick or dies. All three key words ***hatred***, ***revenge***, and ***grudge***, are stumbling blocks to holiness.

In our second reading, St. Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians because of the division going on among them. Some said, they were following Apollos and some said they were following Paul or Cephas. They were probable threatening violence upon each other because Paul said **“if anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person…”** We are the temple of God. St, Paul told the Corinthians that they are the temple of the Holy Spirit through their baptism and so they should be united and holy. Division is not a product of holiness, it exists in a community because of the evil one. Division is not from God. The people in the Corinth community were not united.

We must always remember that God’s ways are not our ways. St. Paul went further by insisting that what seems to be nonsense to humans, is God’s wisdom, and what seems to be weakness to humans, is God’s strength. God’s ways bring us to holiness while human wisdom leads us to destruction. That is why Paul said, **“If anyone thinks he is wise worldly, he better become a fool in the eyes of the world.”** It is not for us in our worldly wisdom to tell God how to run the universe or our lives. For example in the eyes of the world, Catholics are foolish for desiring to keep marriage together when divorce is easier.

Others may judge the Church heartless in its opposition to abortion, gay life style, or transgender life style, and cry out for freedom of choice to do whatever pleases them. Brothers and sisters, please do not follow them. Follow Jesus and His Gospel passed on through the Apostles. The point is, the way of the world, is a Godless approach to what we do with our bodies.’ They lead us to eternal destruction. They may think that it is ridiculous to believe that bread and wine after consecration becomes the body and blood of Christ. But the ways of God are eternally wise. We have to desire at all times to glorify God with our bodies and offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus gave us what will open the gate of holiness into our lives for us through the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us that we must love those who may wish to harm us and not go the way of revenge. But open our lives to the gate of love and forgiveness. That is when others will see the difference between Christians and non-Christians and we will be spreading the Gospel because others would want to know why and how we can do this. Our response would be, it is because of our love for Jesus who told us to open wide the gates of love and forgiveness so we can be holy. And we know the Lord is faithful in all his words and loving in all his deeds.

Jesus’ message is so countercultural. He told us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. That is the radical message of the Gospel and mind blowing in contrast to what the world tell us to do. The world tells us to hate our enemies and take a pound of flesh for a pound of flesh. What Jesus’ teaching in the sermon of the mount tell us is that we should be a soldier for Christ and stand up against worldly wisdom and glorify God with our minds and bodies. When we do all these teachings of Christ, we will see the face of Christ in others and others will see Christ in us because we will be Christ like He who laid down His life for us on the cross and left us His body and blood in the Eucharist.

As we come with utmost reverence to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us ask Jesus to increase our holiness.