

## Second Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A-2026

Last Sunday we celebrated the Baptism of Jesus Christ and how He received the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit as He prepared to begin His public ministry. We were also provided with the opportunity to renew our commitment to a life of holiness through the renewal of our baptismal promises.

In our second reading from the first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds the church in Corinth of their call to "be holy." To be honest with you, the whole notion of holiness can be quite intimidating, especially when unrealistically understood as total and sustained daily perfection. Sometimes, it can even be a big turn off if we have had bad experiences with people who view themselves as holy or who are viewed by others as holy. I had to experience healing in my understanding of holiness because of some unpleasant experiences with church seminary during my time in Seminary and early priesthood. They would pray the rosary a

hundred miles an hour. It seemed like pure ritual without relationship. They were without the joy of the Lord. They radiated a spirit of unhappiness and anger. They were filled with spiritual pride that led them to look down on others in a spirit of self-righteous judgment. They didn't treat people well.

My negative experiences led me to wrestle with the notion of authentic holiness. I came to discover that authentic holiness is always rooted in love. It flows from a love for Jesus Christ and other people that is grounded in the truth of divine revelation and expresses itself through humility, kindness, compassion, and a spirit of service. Authentic holiness is not an external persona or mere formality, but an interior disposition of heart that guides and inspires us in our thoughts, attitudes, motivations, words, actions, and lifestyle.

The following definition of holiness provided by the "United States Catholic Catechism for Adults" provides another essential ingredient in a life holiness: "Holiness is a state of goodness in which a person with the help of God's grace, the action of

the Holy Spirit, and a life of prayer, is freed from sin and evil.” This definition of holiness emphasizes that growing in holiness, is only possible with the help of God. We cannot create and sustain a life of holiness on our own resources. Despite our best and most sincere efforts, we cannot save ourselves. We can only experience salvation through Jesus Christ. We continually need Him to motivate us to strive for holiness and to strengthen us in our ongoing efforts.

This definition also stresses that there is an inseparable relationship between holiness of life and a growing freedom from sin and evil. This is the part that is not so popular. Therefore, the daily decision to grow in virtue and let go of vice, with the help of Jesus, is essential in continually growing closer to Him. We are challenged to take the sin in our lives seriously, even if we are not living in mortal sin or serious sin that jeopardizes our eternal salvation. We are called to be vigilant even about our less serious sins. We are motivated to strive for personal, religious, spiritual, and moral excellence, out of love for Jesus, and a desire to grow in our intimacy with and faithfulness to Him.

The definition of holiness provided in the Catechism further states: "Such a person when gifted with holiness, must still resist temptation, repent of sins that may be committed, and realize that remaining holy is a lifelong pilgrimage with many spiritual and moral challenges." If we have grown cynical and discouraged about the possibility of overcoming sin and evil in our own lives, may we draw encouragement from the reality that holiness is a lifelong process. There will be times we will experience tremendous progress. At other times we may hit a plateau for a while. And at other moments, we may regress, sometimes in serious ways and for extended periods of time. If we pay attention, we will discover that our progress in holiness is directly influenced by the depth of our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That is our fuel and catalyst for ongoing change and conversion of life.

The worst thing that we can do whenever we sin is to hide or run from Jesus out of shame and guilt.

We need to lean into the Lord more than ever. In the moments that we choose sin instead of holiness, it is important to remind ourselves of Christ's unwavering love for us and the truth we can only find the healing and salvation we need by staying close to the Lord. May we continue to trust in Jesus's loving mercy and reach out to Him even when our shame and guilt powerfully tell us to flee His face. May we do this even when we are stuck or self-satisfied in sinful ways of thinking, acting, and living.

When we reach the point where our relationship with Jesus Christ is truly central in our lives and worldview, we begin to experience a unique type of spiritual suffering. It is the suffering of wanting to "be" more and "do more for the Lord, but coming face to face, time and time again, with our own weaknesses, limitations, blind spots, and interior resistance. Like St. Paul, we lament, "I do the things I don't want to do." In the clutches of our spiritual suffering, we can draw hope from trusting that Jesus knows our hearts, and He sees all the sincere efforts that we make with the help of His grace. He sees

that we care. He sees that we are striving. He sees that He and His will really mean something to us. And that makes all the difference to Him. It touches His heart profoundly and draws Him closer to us.

Our first reading from the prophet Isaiah reminds us that holiness is not just something personal and private between me and Jesus, or you and Jesus: "I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Holiness involves being a light to the nations by our example of personal goodness and faithfulness to Jesus Christ; our treatment and service of others; our work for truth and justice; and our inspiring witness of faith, hope and love.

Christ also calls us to be a light to the nations as, His Body, the church. We are an important part of the church. The church was part of God's plan from the beginning so that He could bring His love, grace, mercy, truth, and salvation, to the "ends of the earth." The Church is the instrument through which Christ desires to assist and form us in responding to

the lifelong call to holiness. We do this through prayer, embracing the teachings of the Sacred Scriptures and our Catholic faith, the reception of the sacraments, and the wisdom and encouragement of a community of believers.

As members of Christ's body, the Church, we are saints and sinners. We are weeds and wheat. Yet despite our sinfulness as individuals and a collective body, the church remains holy. Its holiness endures by the presence of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit who fills and empowers us the more we open ourselves in a spirit of faith, trust and surrender. Using the words of John the Baptist in our Gospel reading from John, the more we "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," the more we will be a light to the nations.

Jesus Christ is the source of our personal holiness and our holiness as a Church. Being a light to the nations begins with a daily and ongoing commitment to a life of holiness through Jesus Christ. Our holiness of life is an instrument that Christ can use to bring holiness into the home,

workplace, classroom, church, and society, from one generation to the next.

The following words of the singer Celine Dion, when viewed through the lens of faith, capture the essence of holiness when applied both to our individual and communal relationship Jesus Christ and our personal relationships and interactions with other people:

“You were my strength when I was weak. You were my voice when I couldn’t speak. You were my eyes when I couldn’t see. You saw the best there was in me. Lifted me up when I couldn’t speak. You gave me faith cause you believed. I’m everything I am because you loved me.” This is holiness in its most healing and transformative expression. This is holiness we are called to as individuals and as a church.



