

## A CALL TO HOLINESS AND PRAYER

*“Be holy, **for** I, the Lord, your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:1)*

*“Be perfect just **as** your Heavenly Father is perfect”(Mt.5:48)*

*“As a young man marries a virgin so your Builder shall marry you”(Isaiah, 62:5)*

*“Remain in me as I remain in you. I am the vine you are the branches.” (John 15:4a.5a)*

*“What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love Him, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 Cor.2:9-10)*

*“I urge you brothers to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, pleasing and perfect” (Rom 12:1-2)*

*“If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love” (John 15:10)*

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*“Be holy, **for** I, the Lord, your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:1) “Be perfect just **as** your Heavenly Father is perfect”(Mt.5:48)*

The call to Holiness is not an invitation but the goal of our life: in the Old Testament we hear that we need to be holy because our God is holy; it is a necessary consequence. He is our Creator and we have been created in his image and therefore we are called to reflect His holiness in ourselves. In the New Testament Jesus challenges us to be perfect as the Father is perfect; how can we become perfect like the Father? Isn't this an impossible request? But Jesus cannot ask for the impossible; it means that the concept of becoming perfect is different from what we think.

Holiness in fact doesn't mean that we have to be perfect: “Saints are not the most perfect ones but the most courageous ones”. I read this sentence many years ago on the back cover of a book on the life of St. Clair of Assisi. At that time the concept of “holiness as the goal of my life” was not very appealing to me. I could not see myself becoming a “perfect” person; I had my limitations and my sins and I was too lazy to think that I could change. But when I read that saints are not the most perfect people but the most courageous ones, something clicked in me and I said, “I like that”!

Also, reflecting on holiness I used to have another misconception: saints were always the ones who suffered the most and let me tell you, that definitely didn't attract me!

However holiness doesn't mean suffering although saints usually suffer; holiness is profound joy because it has to do with God. Saints were the ones that in the midst of the greatest trials were able to keep a profound sense of peace and even joy. Therefore I thought, "if becoming a saint means to discover the secret of joy even in the midst of problems and sufferings, then, sign me up!"

But, so, what does it mean that holiness has to do with God? The second sentence I have put at the beginning of your handout brought me some light:

*"As a young man marries a virgin so your Builder shall marry you" (Isaiah, 62:5)*

Holiness in Hebrew is translated with a word that means: "being set apart" and "being married with". So Holiness means to be set apart for God to be married to Him... would you believe that?

Holiness has to do with LOVE. Before having to do with our effort to love God, Holiness has to do with God's passionate love for us that can perfect our life and make it whole and holy.

We just need to be open to receive this gift of love from God. To invite Him over and over again in our lives so that He may transform them.

Another sentence from Scripture can help us:

*"Remain in me as I remain in you. I am the vine you are the branches." (John 15:4a.5a)*

The secret of holiness is in a word: **REMAIN**. In the passage of the vine and the branches Jesus repeats the word "remain" for 11 times in 10 verses... that must be important! In life (and in Scripture as well) when we to make sure that the person in front of me has understood what we are saying, we keep repeating the same concept over and over again so that it might be engraved in their minds. Moreover this passage is part of the last discourse of Jesus before his arrest; therefore these are his last words, his will for us; these chapters are the core of the Gospel, the very heart of Jesus shared with us.

So, we understand that we need to remain. But what does this mean?

There are 2 ways to remain in this love: prayer and action:

- 1) *PRAYER: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love Him, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit" (1 Cor.2:9-10)*

Prayer is the way to remain in God's love and to receive his hidden treasure; the treasure of His friendship and happiness.

There are three forms of prayer: vocal, mental, contemplative

Vocal prayer is the first form of prayer that we have learned and very likely the last that we will recite on our death bed; it is the prayers that we were taught and we learned by heart and that accompany us daily. But vocal prayer has a risk: to remain only on our lips and to not change our hearts.

Contemplative prayer on the other hand is something that only God can give; it is not for us to achieve it; it is a gift, a sharing in His very life of love. However we are all called to contemplative prayer and we might have already been given that gift at times in our life.

The best way to prepare ourselves to receive the gift of contemplative prayer is to practice mental prayer; therefore I would like to spend some time explaining it because it is the form of prayer that can help us to become like Jesus, like God.

The goal of Mental prayer is **TRANSFORMATION**: "I urge you brothers to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, pleasing and perfect" (Rom 12:1-2)

St. Paul says that in order to be transformed we need to start with the renewal of our minds so that we can discern the course of action that is according to God's will. Mental prayer is called like this because it starts from our minds and then gets to our hearts.

There are 4 easy steps to make Mental Prayer (known also as Lectio Divina or Catholic Meditation):

I will call them **THE 4 "Rs"**:

- 1) **READ:** Read the passage slowly – it contains a message from God, we need to pay attention. While you read you might underline words, sentences that catch your attention
- 2) **REFLECT:** it has to do with the work of our mind (remember we are talking of "mental prayer")  
Ask yourself these questions:  
What are the general messages in the passage?  
What are the messages that I hear the Lord telling me through the word/sentences I have underlined?
- 3) **RELATE/RECEIVE:** it has to do with our heart (prayer is a relationship);  
Talk with the Lord about your previous thinking asking to help you, to guide you, to give you courage, to grant you a particular virtue...  
Thank Him for His love and faithfulness to you...  
Ask and prepare yourself to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit
- 4) **RESOLVE:** it has to do with our will in action (prayer is supposed to transform our lives)  
Choose a concrete resolution, based on your reflection and conversation with the Lord on which you want to focus during the day.  
A resolution needs to be: concrete, easy, doable today

- 2) The other way to “remain” in Jesus’ love is ACTION: (that is the practice of virtues that you learn by doing your resolution every day)

Jesus said: *“If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love” (John 15:10)*

The word “commandments” often makes us think of obligation and not of love. But the commandments have been given by God to humanity as road signs or road maps or GPS to get to our final destination that is Heaven. Even better the commandments are like the food that we need in order to develop our bodies and to stay healthy. We are not called to come up with road signs or to cook the food, we are just asked to follow them and to eat it... it shouldn’t be that complicated. Plus when we have found the right road or eaten the right food we are happy people!

My best wish for you and for myself is that we might be determined to “remain” in the Lord through prayer and acts of love to be able to become the saints we are called to be!