

## Called to Holiness

Janet Schaeffler, OP

“If someone said you were holy, what would they mean and how would you feel about that?” That was the essay assignment given to a group of undergraduates.

Amazingly, many of their responses were: I would resent it. I'm not boring. I have lots of friends. I like to have fun.

Would you answer that way? Would your friends, the young people, the youth, the children that you know?

As ministers, as catechists, -- all of us are challenged by that to look at our perception of holiness and how we see ourselves. And as catechists (which we all are), how are we calling each other – all those with whom we share life in our parishes, our neighborhoods and communities to holiness, the holiness which Jesus modeled?

Vatican II's constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, reversed the centuries-old tradition that clergy and religious were somehow called to more holiness. The Council reaffirmed everyone's call to holiness. Certainly each person is going to live out their holiness in a unique way because we each are unique creations of God, but the call to holiness is not graded – more for some, lesser for others.

We have a tendency to see holiness as climbing a ladder; doing good things in order to “gain holiness.” We already are holy, graced, because we are made in God's image. We need to celebrate that and live it out. Living as disciples of Jesus we continue to grow and deepen that holiness.

In *The Color Purple*, Celie asks, “Do we go to church to find God?” The answer she is given is, “No. God isn't showing at church. We go to church to share God.” That would mean we have to find God somewhere else first – before we come to church. That is the reality.

Think of your lives. Jot down all the roles you have in life. That list – all of them – is your path to holiness. Not just prayer and religious practices, going to church, our involvement in our parishes – as important as that is – which probably occupies about 3% of our lives. Sometimes we have a distorted view of holiness; we think that it happens only in church. It happens in the totality of our lives or it doesn't happen at all. The theologian Karl Rahner reminded us: “The most comprehensive act of a Christian is to become a human being whose roots are divine.”

Holiness happens in the everydayness of our lives. We become holy in parenting, in friendship, in work, in sickness, in loss, in the struggle for justice.

In *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity*, the U.S. bishops said “It is characteristic that lay men and women hear the call to holiness in

- the very web of their existence in and through the events of the world,
- the pluralism of modern living,
- the complex decisions and conflicting values they must struggle with,
- the richness and fragility of sexual relationships,
- the delicate balance between activity and stillness,
- love and loss.” (*Lumen Gentium* #31)

The simplicity and complexity of everyday holiness!

There are many ways to define or describe holiness – which is awe-inspiring and challenging. They call us to deeper relationships and wondrous living. Holiness could be described as unconditional compassionate love – even for those who do not deserve to be loved. Jesus told us, “Do good to those who hate you.”

Another description perhaps comes from the Jewish saying that on judgment day we will be judged on all that we should have enjoyed in life – that our loving Creator gave us – but didn't.

What is your definition of holiness? How is it a part of the very fabric of the everydayness of your life?