



# Christian Spirituality: Becoming Holy

## *Reflection*

“For to me, living is Christ,” exclaims St. Paul (Philippians 1:21). His words capture the essence of holiness. Holiness is a gift and a call, and another gift. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that because we are created by God and for God, the desire for God is carved into our hearts. God continuously calls us to himself in communion and conversation. Only in him will we discover all we are searching for in this life.<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo expressed this poignantly, “You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised...for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”<sup>2</sup> It seems as if there is a God-sized hole built into our human DNA and we will never be at peace, never know true happiness, until that hole is filled.

Holiness is a call. From the very beginning of his earthly ministry, Jesus proclaimed, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15) He called disciples together to follow him on his way to God the Father. In the course of his ministry, Jesus showed them that he is the one who can fill the God-sized hole in us: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

The power to answer Jesus’ call, to live in Christ, is given as gift by the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of Christian initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. These sacraments are the very foundation of Christian discipleship. Through them we receive the vocation to holiness and to the mission of evangelization. They ground us to proclaim the good news to everyone. These sacraments of initiation confer the graces we need to live our Christian vocation in the power of the Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, Christian spirituality has the following characteristics:

### **Christian spirituality is grounded in the Trinity.**

Christian spirituality “stresses a relationship with the three persons of the Trinity.”<sup>4</sup> The Christian moves constantly with the Spirit toward the Father of creation (see Romans 8:19–23). We heed the words and call of Jesus who, throughout the gospels, is directed toward the love of his Father. We pray to Christ and delight in carrying out his mission by doing our Father’s will. Trinitarian life is the ultimate source of God’s saving grace among us.

### **Christian spirituality calls for conversion.**

Essential to Christian spirituality is the acknowledgment that weaknesses, evil, and sin are powerful realities. This truth is presented by St. Paul in his letter to the Romans (7:14–24) and reiterated in the documents of Vatican Council II.<sup>5</sup> However, we believe that Jesus Christ confronted sin, evil, and death through his life, death, and resurrection, and triumphed over them. By the power of the Spirit, we can turn from weakness, evil, and sin, surrender to the will of God, and experience a change—new life in Christ.

### **Christian spirituality struggles for justice.**

Being holy and struggling for justice are two inseparable realities essential to Christian spirituality. However, they are not always easy to integrate. Papal statements and those of many Catholic bishops present the reign of God as brought about through evangelization (proclamation and witness), works of mercy, and social justice (with a preferential option for the poor locally and globally). There is a call for each member of the People of God to evangelize: Evangelization is “the essential mission of the Church”<sup>6</sup> and “...we have an essential role in sharing...faith through our daily lives as believers. Looked at this way, evangelization is what we are all about!”<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, Pope Paul VI explains that there is also an intimate link between evangelization and doing justice: "...it is impossible to accept 'that in evangelization one could or should ignore the importance of the problems so much discussed today, concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world.'"<sup>8</sup> The U.S. Catholic Bishops further exhort us: "We need to build local communities of faith where our social teaching is central, not fringe; where social ministry is integral, not optional; where it is the work of every believer, not just the mission of a few committed people and committees."<sup>9</sup>

**Christian spirituality integrates and balances the inner and outer life.**

Each of us is called to become a contemplative in action. Key to this is the integration and balance of one's inner life of prayer and contemplation with the outer life of service and involvement in the world. Growing spiritually through the tension that this produces is one of the greatest creative experiences a Christian can encounter.

The prophet Micah proposed this same balance when he said, "...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8) Our call, then, is to walk humbly with God (in personal and communal relationships), love tenderly (in relationship with God, with others in community, and with all creation), and act justly (in personal relationships, in the wider public arena, and with all creation).

**Christian spirituality is marked by hope.**

Authentic Christian spirituality is marked by hope. The resurrected Jesus has triumphed! There is profound joy and peace for us in knowing we are personally known and valued by our Creator, loved and saved by Jesus, and befriended and strengthened by the Spirit. Courage and perseverance grows from a faith which promises that ultimately there will be a full realization of love, truth, and beauty—that the full goodness of God's creation will come to fruition.<sup>10</sup>

**Christian spirituality is expressed by contemplation and action.**

Various expressions of Christian spirituality have grown up around the lives of great saints and witnesses in our history. They are there for us to consider, adopt, or adapt according to our own personalities and to how we are being called by God. These have traditionally been either contemplative or active in their emphasis. The contemplative, situated very often in the monastic tradition, has always sought a life of total surrender to Jesus Christ. The emphasis in a contemplative life is on silence and solitude, work and community. The needs of the world are integrated into contemplative prayer. The active Christian, concerned about apostolic service in the world, tries to unite a contemplative with an active life. Activity feeds a prayerful spirit and prayer energizes ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 27.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions* 1,1,1: Jacques-Paul Mingne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, (Paris: 1841-1855).

<sup>3</sup> See *Catechism*, 1533.

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt from *Small Christian Communities: A Vision of Hope for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Revised and Updated* by Thomas A. Kleissler, Margo A. LeBert, and Mary C. McGuinness. Copyright © 1997 by RENEW International. Used by permission of Paulist Press. [www.paulistpress.com](http://www.paulistpress.com), p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et spes)*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> *On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii nuntiandi)*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Excerpt from *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States*, © 1993, United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Washington, DC, p. 2. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this work may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

<sup>8</sup> *On Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii nuntiandi)*, 1975, 29 and 31; Paul VI, Address for the opening of the Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (27 September 1974): AAS 66 (1974), p. 562.

<sup>9</sup> Excerpt from *Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish*, © 1993, United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Washington, DC, p. 4. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this work may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

<sup>10</sup> See *Catechism*, 2657.