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# *Your* **CHRISTIAN** *Vocation*

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SECTION 1

# The Universal Call to Holiness

**MAIN IDEA**  
You will feel most fulfilled when you have union with Christ. This is called *holiness* or *saintliness*.



Everyone wants to be happy. This is the common human experience that transcends time and culture. Every person searches for happiness in various ways, such as in friendships, entertainment, or success. However, even the greatest moment here on earth will never completely satisfy you. The party always comes to a close, the friendship goes through difficult periods, the money runs out. Every moment of happiness always ends. This is because you were made for a deeper, more profound fulfillment than anything this world can offer.

God created you out of love. When he created you, he created you *for himself*. “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for” (CCC, 27). Nothing on this earth will ever fully satisfy. This is because you were made for more than this earth: you were made for communion with the infinite God. When you recognize and rejoice in the love God has for you, you are living out the full truth of your existence.



## NOTE TAKING

**Main Ideas.** Create a chart like this one to help you organize your answers to the following questions.

What were you created for?	
What is holiness?	
Who is called to be a saint?	
What is your destination?	





# It Is Jesus That You Seek

At World Youth Day in Rome in 2000, Pope John Paul II gave a famous address to the youth. Carefully read his words below, and answer the questions that follow.

It is Jesus in fact that you seek when you dream of happiness; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is he who provoked you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is he who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle. It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be ground down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal. (Address at Vigil of Prayer)

## ASSIGNMENT

Answer the following questions.

1. What did Pope John Paul II mean when he said, “It is Jesus in fact that you seek when you dream of happiness”?
2. What do you think he meant by “it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life”? What are the “false masks” in your own life?
3. What great thing is Jesus stirring you to do with your life?

# Holiness Is a Gift

God made you for the deeply profound, forever kind of happiness that only he can provide. Your happiness will not be complete until you have union with God. This is called **holiness**. To be holy means to be sanctified—that is, set apart for God, the Holy One. To be holy is the calling of every person: “This is the will of God, your holiness” (1 Thes 4:3). The **universal call to holiness** is rooted in Baptism, by which a person is conformed to Christ and brought into the very life of the Blessed Trinity. Baptism calls a person to the fullness of Christian life and perfect charity. Christ said that you must “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48).

Perfection may seem impossible. That is because it is impossible for you to be perfect by your own powers. Like all people, you are wounded and broken by sinfulness. Only by God’s grace can you be united with him and thus obtain sanctity. Because holiness is an objective gift from Christ offered at Baptism, this gift makes you a son or daughter of God, thus sharing in his divine nature.

To put it succinctly, to be holy is to know and love Jesus and to conform your life to his. Pope Francis has emphasized repeatedly that although holiness is indeed for everyone, it is always a divine gift to be received: “First of all, we must bear clearly in mind that sanctity is not something we can procure for ourselves, that we can obtain by our own qualities and abilities. Sanctity is a gift, it is a gift granted to us by the Lord Jesus, when He takes us to Himself and clothes us in Himself, He makes us like Him” (General Audience, November

**holiness** The state of being set apart for God.

**universal call to holiness** The call to all Christians, no matter their state of life, to be sanctified. It is based on Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount: “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48).



19, 2014). Because holiness is about having a relationship with the Lord, it is requisite that you cooperate with God’s grace by striving for holiness. You are able to access this life of grace in the Church primarily through the sacraments. Holiness is the defining reality of the Church, the Bride of Christ. Jesus “loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her . . . that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:25–27). The promises of this world will always leave you empty. It is only by pursuing holiness that your deepest desires will be satisfied. Carefully read these further words of Pope Francis:

God says to you: do not be afraid of holiness, do not be afraid to aim high, to let yourself be loved and purified by God, do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Let



us be infected by the holiness of God. Every Christian is called to sanctity (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 19–42); and sanctity does not consist especially in doing extraordinary things, but in allowing God to act. . . . Let us not lose the hope of holiness, let us follow this path. Do we want to be saints? The Lord awaits us, with open arms; he waits to accompany us on the path to sanctity. (General Audience, October 2, 2013)

Pope Francis emphasized that holiness is not an opportunity just for a few but rather a calling for everyone. That said, your holiness is not ultimately about your own actions: holiness consists primarily in allowing God to act in you.

## Holiness Is about Becoming a Saint

Pope Francis asks, “Do we want to be saints?” You can experience holiness here on earth through a relationship with Jesus Christ. But this relationship and your quest for saintliness will ultimately be fulfilled in heaven. You were created to live forever in the love of the Blessed Trinity. On a basic level, a **saint** is any person in heaven. And since you are called to the **beatific vision** of heaven, you are called to be a saint.

The Church goes through a process of **canonization** for certain saints, to state that they are indeed with God in heaven. The canonization process is not intended to hold up saints as some unattainable ideal but rather to show that they practiced “heroic virtue”



# How to Be Holy

Holiness is a gift from God. Holiness is about a relationship with a Person, Jesus Christ, and it always comes from his initiative. Since it is a grace freely given, there is

absolutely nothing you can do to “earn” holiness.

That said, because you have a free will, you must actively cooperate with his grace along this path to holiness. Pope John Paul II wrote in his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (*At the Beginning of the New Millennium*) that the Church needs to teach her people a genuine “training in holiness.” He offers some specific suggestions on how to live a holy life:

**Prayer.** You must truly learn how to pray, to enter into the life of the Trinity. Prayer is foremost lived out in

and that they are our “models and intercessors” (CCC, 828). In other words, the declaration of saints affirms the holiness of God working in his people, and thus it gives you hope to become a saint too.

**saint** “The ‘holy one’ who leads a life in union with God through the grace of Christ and receives the reward of eternal life. The Church is called the communion of saints, of the holy ones” (CCC, Glossary).

**beatific vision** “The contemplation of God in heavenly glory, a gift of God which is a constitutive element of the happiness (or *beatitude*) of heaven” (CCC, Glossary).

**canonization** “The solemn declaration by the Pope that a deceased member of the faithful may be proposed as a model and intercessor to the Christian faithful and venerated as a saint on the basis of the fact that the person lived a life of heroic virtue or remained faithful to God through martyrdom” (CCC, Glossary).



St. Thérèse of Lisieux felt the call to religious life and entered the same Carmelite order that her two older sisters had when she was only fifteen. She was canonized in 1925, only twenty-eight years after her death.

the liturgy of the Church, but it must also take on a personal dimension. Living a full life of prayer is the “secret of a truly vital Christianity, which has no reason to fear the future, because it returns continually to the sources and finds in them new life” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 32).

**The Eucharist.** The Mass is “the summit towards which the Church’s action tends and at the same time the source from which comes all her strength” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). This means that the Eucharist is both the highest point and the foundation for the entire Christian life. If your goal is union with Christ, it would make sense to make an effort to receive worthily his very Body, Blood, soul, and divinity in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Pope John Paul II emphasized the importance of the Sunday Eucharist; it should be the heart of the Lord’s Day that you have set aside for worship of God.

**The Sacrament of Penance.** Pope John Paul II highlighted the need to be awake to the reality of sin, to be aware of your own weakness and brokenness. However, your sinfulness is nothing compared to salvation offered in Christ. He has bound his graces of forgiveness

to the Sacrament of Penance. Partaking of the Sacrament of Penance is essential in the journey to holiness.

**The primacy of grace.** Sometimes on the path to holiness, you can fall into the trap of thinking that results depend entirely upon your own effort and ability. “God of course asks us really to cooperate with his grace, and therefore invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the Kingdom. But it is fatal to forget that ‘without Christ we can do nothing’ (cf. Jn 15:5)” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 38). Returning again and again to prayer reminds you that the source of all sanctity is God himself.

**Listening to and proclaiming the Word.** The role of Scripture in your journey of holiness is indispensable. Pope John Paul II encouraged *lectio divina*, which is the prayerful reading of Scripture seeking how it specifically applies to your life. Once you encounter the Word, you become a “servant of the word” and are compelled to share the encounter with others.





This painting by Fra Angelico, *The Forerunners of Christ with Saints and Martyrs*, depicts men and women of all ages who dedicated their lives, and often their deaths, to Christ.

It is important to clear up the misconception that a saint is the “opposite” of a sinner. This is not so. Instead, a saint is a sinner who has embraced the redemptive graces of Christ. Remember that holiness does not mean sinlessness; it means being set apart, ultimately for the happiness of heaven. Becoming a saint is not about stifling yourself; instead, it is about becoming your true self—your most fulfilled, happiest self. A fish was made for water, so it is most free when it is in the water. You were made for sainthood and will be the most fulfilled when you accept this path. Contemporary Catholic writer Peter Kreeft writes:

You can become a saint. Absolutely no one and nothing can stop you. It is your free choice. Here is one of the truest and most terrifying sentences I have ever read (from William Law’s *Serious Call*): “If you will look into your own heart in complete honesty, you must admit that

there is one and only one reason why you are not a saint: you do not wholly want to be.”

That insight is terrifying because it is an indictment. But it is also thrillingly hopeful because it is an offer, an open door. Each of us can become a saint. We really can. (*How to Win the Culture War*)

Your calling is to become a saint. You can choose at every moment whether to say yes to this calling or not. Christians are not supposed to be completely comfortable in this world, because life on earth is not their ultimate destination. St. Thérèse of Lisieux famously said, “The world is your ship, not your home.” You were made for heaven. That means both your origin and your destination are with God. This is the answer to the question “Where am I going?”



# SECTION ASSESSMENT



## NOTE TAKING

Use the chart you made to help you answer the following questions.

1. Why will nothing on this earth fully satisfy you?
2. What does it mean to be holy?



## COMPREHENSION

3. Why is it inaccurate to say that a saint is the opposite of a sinner?



## CRITICAL THINKING

4. Explain the seeming contradiction that Jesus calls you to perfection and yet perfection is impossible on your own.



## APPLICATION

5. Share your reaction to this famous quotation from the French convert Léon Bloy: “The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.”

SECTION 2

# Your Personal Call

MAIN IDEA

Your universal vocation is to holiness, but God has a unique path for you to reach this goal. Being a disciple is part of walking this path.



Recall that the term *vocation* comes from a word that means “to call” or “to cry out.” A vocation is God calling out to you; it is an invitation from him. A vocation is God crying out to you to achieve the destiny he intends for your life both on earth and in heaven. You are personally called to communion with God the Father through Christ. You cannot find your vocation apart from Christ, who brings light to your specific vocation. This is true for every human person. You are called to holiness. You are called to be a saint in Christ’s name.

## A Vocation Is a Call

God provides a unique path for every person to reach this ultimate vocation to holiness. God does not just call *people*; he calls *you*. He knew you before you were born (see Jeremiah 1:5). He has counted the hairs on your head (see Luke 12:7). He knows you better than you know yourself.

God revealed himself progressively over time throughout the Old Covenant in order to make his people “capable of responding to him, and of knowing him, and of loving him far beyond [our] own natural capacity” (CCC, 52). The fullness of his self-revelation came in the Divine Person of Jesus Christ. “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways



## NOTE TAKING

**Identifying Supporting Details.** Make a chart like this one. As you read this section, fill in the corresponding details.

Aspects of a vocation	Details
Personal call	
Lived in the Church	
Discipleship	



Mary, who was with the disciples at Pentecost, is known as the “first disciple.” Her answer of “yes” to the angel’s request of her to be the Mother of God was a human being’s first acceptance of Christ.

to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe” (Heb 1:1–2). There is no further Revelation after Christ.

Some people know from a young age what God wants for them. Others may try different directions and their own methods, until they finally find what path is congruent with God’s desires. Many aspects of the paths traveled to holiness are the same: there are prayers of petition to do God’s will, reception of the sacraments, the offering up of your sufferings, and learning about the faith. While each person’s path to holiness is otherwise varied, all paths to holiness do lead to Christ.

## Your Vocation Is Lived in the Church

Jesus promised not to leave his people orphans (see John 14:18). He sent the Holy Spirit to guide his

people, the Church. Transmission of God’s Revelation is entrusted to the Church through two distinct modes: Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Sacred Scripture refers to the inspired Word of God found in the Bible. Sacred Tradition is the living transmission of the **Deposit of Faith** handed on through the successors of the Apostles. Both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition are safeguarded by the **Magisterium**, the official teaching authority of the Church.

**Deposit of Faith** The body of saving truths and the core beliefs of Catholicism that are contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and faithfully preserved and handed on by the Magisterium. The Deposit of Faith contains the fullness of God’s Revelation.

**Magisterium** The official teaching authority of the Church. Jesus bestowed the right and power to teach in his name on Peter and the Apostles and their successors—that is, the pope and the college of bishops. The authority of the Magisterium extends to specific precepts of the natural law because following these precepts is necessary for salvation.



This means that the Church, the Body of Christ, is crucial to your personal vocation to holiness and to your salvation. The Second Vatican Council emphasized that “it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained” (CCC, 816 quoting *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3). Regarding holiness, the Church herself is holy. “The Church is sanctified by [Christ]; through him and with him she becomes sanctifying. ‘All the activities of the Church are directed, as toward their end, to the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God’” (CCC, 824, quoting *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). The Church is holy because she is the Bride of Christ; she is joined to Christ’s holiness. She also has one of Christ’s means to holiness—that is, the sacraments.

## Your Vocation Is Lived as a Disciple

Related to the call to holiness within the Church is your responsibility to be a **disciple**. Simply put, a disciple is a follower of Jesus. But discipleship goes deeper than this. Jesus invited his disciples into his own life. He called them to abide in him: “Remain in me, as I remain in you. . . . I am the vine, you are the branches” (Jn 15:4–5). And he declared a bodily communion with his followers: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (Jn 6:56).

Thus, to be a disciple means to share in Christ’s very life, his “mission, joy, and sufferings” (CCC, 787). This leads to an important point about the pursuit of holiness through discipleship: it is not always easy. Jesus said to his disciples, “In the world you will have trouble”; however, he immediately assured them, “but take courage, I have conquered the world” (Jn 16:33). Christian discipleship demands that you take up your cross and follow him. Christ has promised to be united to you in your trials, such as your schoolwork,



Bl. Charles de Foucauld

difficulties with friends and family, and the disappointments of daily life. He won your redemption through the Cross, and you are baptized into this Cross, so that you might share in the Resurrection. Christ remains present to you always in the Catholic Church.

The vocation of each person lived through discipleship in Christ is paradoxically both universal and personal. This means that your personal choice of a vocation will have implications not only for yourself but for others as well.

**disciple** A person “who accepted Jesus’ message to follow him. . . . Jesus associated his disciples with his own life, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom of God to [them], and gave them a share in his mission, his joy, and his sufferings” (CCC, Glossary).



# Abandonment to God's Will

Bl. Charles de Foucauld, who lived as a hermit in Northern Africa after a religious conversion in the early twentieth century, wrote this prayer as a statement of his abandonment to the will of God.

Father,

I abandon myself into your hands: do with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you:

I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures—

I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul;

I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,

for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,

to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,

and with boundless confidence,

for you are my Father.

—Bl. Charles de Foucauld

## ASSIGNMENT

Research and print three other prayers that speak of surrendering to God's will. Then write your own heartfelt prayer surrendering your own will to the will of God.

## SECTION ASSESSMENT



### NOTE TAKING

Use the chart you made to help you answer the following questions.

1. How is vocation both personal and universal?
2. Why must a Christian vocation be lived in the Church?
3. What does it mean to be a disciple?



### COMPREHENSION

4. What is the importance of the Church in the life of the Christian?



### REFLECTION

5. What is the meaning of this statement: "You cannot find your vocation apart from Christ"?