

Called to Missionary Holiness

Every Christian is called to holiness and intimacy with the Lord that characterizes the lives of saints such as Teresa of Avila, whose feast we celebrate today. This same invitation is reiterated by Pope Francis, through his 2018 apostolic exhortation *Rejoice and Be Glad (Gaudete et Exsultate)*. Francis' inviting document bears the subtitle: "On the Call to Holiness in Today's World," echoing the identical invitation found in Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* (39-42). As missionary-disciples of Jesus, we listen to some pivotal insights from Pope Francis.

The Pope asserts that his writing is meant to be very practical: "My modest goal is to re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time" (2). The Lord "wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence" (1). Undoubtedly, there are many forms of holiness. "We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness" (11). Francis praises what he calls "the middle class of holiness" (7); this includes ordinary people such as parents, workers, the sick and elderly. Holiness is often found "in our next-door neighbors" (7).

"This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures" (16). We "need only find a more perfect way of doing what we are already doing" (17). "A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness" (19). "You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission" (23). "Life does not have a mission, but is a mission" (27). "To the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world" (33). Francis affirms the challenging words of Leon Bloy: "The only great tragedy in life is not to become a saint" (34). Saint Teresa of Avila would certainly agree!