

# What does it mean to be a saint? Who can become a saint?

We are all called to become saints. But what specifically does being a saint consist of? More importantly, how can we be holy? In this article we recall some ideas on holiness taken from a variety of sources.

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## Summary

1. What does it mean to be a saint?

2. Who can be a saint?

3. How can one be holy?

4. Who are the saints of the Church?

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## **1. What does it mean to be a saint?**

To be a saint is synonymous with being blessed, blissful, happy.

Sanctity is the gift of God that fulfills all human aspirations; it is the fullness of the Christian life that consists in being united to Christ, learning to live as children of God with the grace of the Holy Spirit and living the perfection of charity.

"Holiness, the fullness of the Christian life consists in being united with Christ, in living his mysteries, in making our own his example, his thoughts, his behavior. Holiness is measured by the stature that Christ

attains in us, by the degree to which, with the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life after his. It is to be like Jesus, as St. Paul affirms: "For those whom he foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29) (Benedict XVI, general audience, April 13, 2011).

## Meditate with St. Josemaría

- Holiness means none other than union with God; a greater intimacy with the Lord, more sanctity. (*In Love with the Church*, 5)
- How many new things you have discovered! And yet you are sometimes rather naïve and think you have seen everything, that you have found out everything already. As time goes by, you will be able to reach out and touch the unique and unfathomable treasures of

the Lord, who will always show you *new things*, if you respond with love and sensitivity. Then you will realise that you are only beginning, because holiness consists in identifying oneself with God, with that God of ours who is infinite and inexhaustible. (*Furrow*, 655)

- Don't forget that the saint is not the person who never falls, but rather the one who never fails to get up again, humbly and with holy stubbornness.

(*Friends of God*, 131)

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## 2. Who can be a saint?

Holiness is a universal vocation, which means that it is addressed to all people. God himself told us: "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16) and his Son reminded us: "You must be

perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

"All the faithful of Christ, of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 40). "The Christian faithful are those who, inasmuch as they have been incorporated in Christ through Baptism, have been constituted as the people of God [...] and are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 871).

Pope Francis explains: "We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living

out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by labouring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain" (*Gaudete et Exultate* n. 14).

We might ask ourselves whether those who are not baptized can be saints. As we know, God loves all his creatures and his mercy reaches all of them. If a person who has not been able to receive the gift of baptism lives uprightly, according to the order of conscience and charity, they can attain full union with the love of God through God's justice and

mercy. "Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers, in a way known to God, of the Paschal mystery" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1260). At the same time, we should be aware that we find in the Church the ordinary and necessary means for salvation, for holiness, for reaching heaven.

## **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- Holiness is for everyone, not just for a privileged few: it does not consist in accomplishing extraordinary feats, but in fulfilling with love the little duties of each day. "Do you really want to be a saint? Carry out the little duty of each moment: do what you ought

and concentrate on what you are doing." (*The Way*, no. 815)

- 'Great' holiness consists in carrying out the 'little duties' of each moment. (*The Way*, no. 817)
- Just think, there are so many men and women on earth, and the Master does not fail to call every single one. He calls them to a Christian life, to a life of holiness, to a chosen life, to life eternal. (*The Forge*, no. 13).
- Some of you might think I am referring only to a select few. Don't let the promptings of cowardice or easygoing ways deceive you so easily. Feel, instead, God urging each one of you on, to become another Christ, *ipse Christus*, Christ himself. To put it simply, God is urging us to make our actions consistent with the demands of our faith. For our sanctity, the holiness we should be striving

for, is not a second class sanctity. There is no such thing. The main thing we are asked to do, which is so much in keeping with our nature, is to love: 'charity is the bond of perfection'; a charity that is to be practised exactly as Our Lord himself commands: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind,' holding back nothing for ourselves. This is what sanctity is all about. (*Friends of God*, no. 6)

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### **3. How can one be holy?**

To be holy, it is necessary to freely and humbly accept God's grace, cooperating with our effort to allow ourselves to be transformed by Him.

It is not a matter of doing everything well, of being perfect, or of reaching certain goals or ideals but, rather, of striving to live each day more and more united to God. In this way, all our activity, our thoughts, our desires will become ordered to the charity that Jesus taught us: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mt 22:37, 39)

This commandment is a summary of Christian holiness, and the ordinary means for attaining it are found in the Church, in which is deposited the fullness of the means of salvation. It is in her that by the grace of God we acquire holiness (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 824), which is given to us through the Word and the sacraments.

“Each one of the faithful must willingly hear the Word of God and

accept His Will, and must complete what God has begun by their own actions with the help of God's grace. These actions consist in the use of the sacraments and in a special way the Eucharist, frequent participation in the sacred action of the Liturgy, application of oneself to prayer, self-abnegation, lively fraternal service and the constant exercise of all the virtues. For charity, as the bond of perfection and the fullness of the law, rules over all the means of attaining holiness and gives life to these same means. It is charity which guides us to our final end" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 42).

In other words, God guides us towards holiness. To follow His will, His way, requires the help of grace, since man cannot do it on his own. Grace is acquired through the sacraments - Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Confession - in order to live the first commandment of

love. The life of a Christian who wants to attain holiness will have charity, sincere love for God and others, as its compass. This love, this charity, is materialized in prayer (dealing with God) and in living the virtues (seeking to serve one's neighbor rather than oneself).

"It is the love of God and the love of one's neighbor which points out the true disciple of Christ" (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 42).

## **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- The goal that I am putting before you, or rather that God has marked out for us all, is no illusory or unattainable ideal. I could quote you many specific examples of ordinary men and women, just like you and me, who have met Jesus passing by *quasi in occulto*, at what appeared to be quite ordinary cross-roads in their lives, and

have decided to follow him, lovingly embracing their daily cross. (*Friends of God*, 4)

- Courage! You... can! Don't you see what God's grace did with sleepy-headed Peter, the coward who had denied him..., and with Paul, his fierce and relentless persecutor? (*The Way*, 483)

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#### **4. Who are the saints of the Church?**

A saint in the Church is a witness to the love of God in the world, and has, therefore, a transformative effect on society.

"By canonizing some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace, the Church recognizes the power of the

Spirit of holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as models and intercessors. The saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult moments in the Church's history" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 828).

Throughout the centuries, the Church has offered for the imitation, veneration and invocation of the faithful, some men and women, outstanding for the splendor of their charity and the other evangelical virtues.

## **Meditate with St. Josemaría**

- The saints were not abnormal beings: cases to be studied by a 'modernistic' doctor. They were — they are — normal: of flesh, like yours. And they won. (*The Way*, 133)

- Our Lord is calling us, in our present state, to share his life and make an effort to be holy. I know holiness can sound like an empty word. Too many people think it is unattainable, something to do with ascetical theology — but not a real goal for them, a living reality. The first Christians didn't think that way. They often used the word "saints" to describe each other in a very natural manner: "greetings to all the saints"; "my greetings to every one of the saints in Jesus Christ." (*Christ is Passing By*, 96)
- You were astonished that I approved of the lack of "uniformity" in this apostolate where you work. And I said to you: Unity and variety." You have to be different from one another, as the saints in heaven are different, each having his own personal and special

characteristics. But also as alike one another as the saints, who would not be saints if each of them had not identified himself with Christ. (*The Way*, 947).

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