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"All men and women are called to holiness"

In his November 19 general audience, Pope Francis spoke about the "universal vocation to holiness" stressed by Vatican II: "Holiness is a gift, it is a gift that the Lord Jesus gives us, when He takes us to Himself, clothes us with Himself, and renders us like Himself."

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

A great gift of the Second Vatican Council was that of recovering a vision of the Church founded on communion, and regaining also the principle of authority and of hierarchy in this perspective. This has helped us to understand better that all Christians, in as much as baptized, have the same dignity before the Lord and share the same vocation, which is that to holiness (cf. Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 39-42). Now we ask ourselves: what does this universal vocation to be saints consist of? And how can we achieve it?

First of all we must keep very present that holiness is not something that we procure for ourselves; that we obtain with our qualities and our capacities. Holiness is a gift, it is a gift that the Lord Jesus gives us, when He takes us to Himself, clothes us with Himself, and renders us like Himself. In the Letter

to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul affirms that "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her" (Ephesians 5:25-26). There, holiness is truly the most beautiful face of the Church: it is to rediscover oneself in communion with God, in the fullness of His life and of His love. One understands, then, that holiness is not only the prerogative of some: holiness is a gift that is offered to all; no one is excluded, it is what constitutes the distinctive character of every Christian.

All this makes us understand that, to be holy, it is not necessary to be Bishops, priests or religious ... We are all called to become saints! Very often, however, we are tempted to think that holiness is reserved only to those who have the possibility to detach themselves from ordinary tasks, to dedicate themselves exclusively to prayer. But it is not so!

Some people think that holiness is closing your eyes and putting on a pious face... No! That is not holiness! Holiness is something greater, more profound that God gives us. In fact, it is precisely by living with love and offering Christian witness in our daily tasks that we are called to become saints – and each one in the conditions and in the state in which he finds himself. Are you consecrated? Be holy by living with joy your donation and your ministry. Are you married? Be holy by loving and taking care of your husband or your wife, as Christ did with the Church. Are you an unmarried baptized person? Be holy by doing your work with honesty and competence and offering time to the service of brothers. "But, father, I work in a factory ... I work as an accountant, always with the numbers, I cannot be a saint there..." - "Yes, you can! There, where you work you can become a saint.

God gives you the grace to become a saint. God communicates with you." Always and everywhere you can become a saint, that is, by being receptive to the grace that is working in us and leads us to holiness. Are you a parent or a grandparent? Be holy by passionately teaching your children or your grandchildren to know and to follow Jesus. And this takes a lot of patience, to be a good parent, a good grandfather, a good mother, a good grandmother, it takes a lot of patience and this patience is the holiness exercising patience. Are you a catechist, educator or volunteer? Be a Saint by becoming a visible sign of the love of God and of His presence at our side. This is it: every state of life leads to holiness, always! At home, on the streets, at work, at church, in the moment and with the state of life that you have, a door is opened on the road to sainthood. Do not be discouraged to travel this road. God gives you the

grace to do so. And this is all that the Lord asks, is that we are in communion with Him and serve others. If lived in communion with the Lord and in the service of others.

At this point, each of us can examine our conscience, we can do it now, everyone answering for himself, inside, in silence: So far how have we responded to God's call to holiness? But do I want to improve, to be a better Christian? This is the path to holiness. When the Lord calls us to be saints, he does not call us to something hard or sad... Not at all! It is an invitation to share His joy, to live and offer every moment of our lives with joy, at the same time making it a gift of love for the people around us. If we understand this, everything changes and takes on a new meaning, a beautiful meaning, to begin with the little everyday things. An example. A lady goes to the market to shop and meets

another neighbor and starts talking and then comes the gossip and this lady says, "No, no, no I will not gossip about anyone." That's one step towards holiness, this helps you to become more holy. Then, at home, your son asks you to talk to him about his fantasies: "Oh, I'm so tired, I worked so hard today..." - "But sit down and listen to your son, he needs this." And you sit, you listen with patience... This is a step towards holiness. Then at end the day, we are all tired, but prayer... We must pray! That's one way to holiness. Then Sunday comes and you go to Mass and to take Communion, at times, a good confession that cleans us up a little. This is a step towards holiness. Then, Our Lady, so good, so beautiful, I take up the Rosary and pray. This is a step towards holiness. And so many steps towards holiness, little ones... Then I go down the street, I see a poor person, someone in need, I ask him, give him something, another

step towards holiness. Small things are small steps toward holiness. And every step towards holiness will make us better people, free from selfishness and being closed in on ourselves, and open us up to our brothers and sisters and their needs.

Dear friends, in the First Letter of Saint Peter, this exhortation is addressed to us: "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (4:10-11). See the invitation to holiness! Let us receive it with joy, and support one another, because the path to holiness is not traveled on one's own, each one on his own account, but it is traveled together, in the one Body that is the Church,

loved and rendered holy by the Lord Jesus.

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