



“They are trees planted by streams of water; they bear fruit; their leaves do not wither; in all that they do they prosper.” Ps 1:3

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The Theme for 2019: “GROW IN HOLINESS”

Heb:12:14

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Walking the Path to Holiness

We started with our Theme for the year 2019 “Grow in holiness” the key verse Hebrews 12:14 ***“Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”*** Over the past nine months we have been offered talks on various topics, e.g. *Role of the Holy Spirit in our lives, Managing Emotions, Holiness, Unity in Marriage, Holiness in the family* etc. After listening to all that we have heard, when we introspect our lives can we say that ***“I am a holy person”*** or at least ***trying to become a “holy person”***. The answer may vary from person to person but the answer is expected of us.

Pope Francis wrote an exhortation – **Gaudete Et Exsultate, (Rejoice and Exult)**, quoting Jesus (Mathew 5:12), draws our attention to the point that

“the Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence.” His intention is “to re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities. For the Lord has chosen each one of us “to be holy and blameless before him in love.” (Ephesians 1:4) Notice that the call to holiness is extended to everyone, and not just a select few, which includes you and me, your kids and your parents and your neighbours and your co-workers and your classmates. He wants to discuss how it can be lived in our day, just the way others lived in the past.

Pope Francis starts his discussion about holiness by writing about the saints. He reminds us that “Their lives may not always have been perfect, yet even amid their faults and failings they kept moving forward and proved pleasing to the Lord.” So holiness is not about being perfect. Nor is holiness only recognizable in the people that the Church has named “blessed” or “saint.” He refers to the “saints next door.” Where holiness exists “in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in the elderly religious who never lose their smile.” He points out that holiness is not usually done on our own and apart from others, but most often is lived in relationships.

Pope Francis repeats that the Lord directs the call to holiness personally to each of us. “Be holy, for I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:44, 1 Peter 1:16). A document from Vatican Council II stated this clearly, “all the faithful, whatever their conditions or state, are called by the Lord – each in his or her own way – to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect”

Pope Francis doesn’t think that the call to holiness should be a burden: rather, “it should excite and encourage us to give our all to embrace that unique plan that God willed for each of us from eternity.” Just as it was for Jeremiah, so it is true for us: “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you.” (Jeremiah 1:5) He warns of the false idea that holiness means we have to go away and pray a lot – that’s not true! “We are 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 laboring 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.

Pope Francis says that holiness grows through small steps, and he gives an example: a woman goes shopping, she meets a neighbor and they begin to speak, and the gossip starts. But she says in her heart: ‘No, I will not speak badly of anyone.’ This is a step forward in holiness. Later at home, one of her children wants to talk to her about his hopes and dreams, and even though she is tired, she sits down and listens with patience and love. That is another sacrifice that brings holiness. Later she experiences some anxiety, but recalling the love of the Virgin Mary, she takes her rosary and prays with faith. Yet another path of holiness. Later still, she goes out onto the street, encounters a poor person and stops to say a kind word to him. One more step.

Our holiness is not just something extra, something nice to do, but rather it is our mission given to us by God, to be lived at a specific moment in history. “Your holiness is your mission and no one else’s”. Our mission is lived out in union with Christ, never on our own. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord’s death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him.

To be “a message of the Holy Spirit” is a big responsibility, part of our entire life’s mission. Again Pope Francis provides some practical advice about how to do this: “try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognizing the signs that he gives you. Always ask the Holy Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received. May you come to realize what the word is, the message of Jesus renewed by the Spirit, so that this can happen, lest you fail in your precious mission. The Lord will bring it to fulfilment despite your mistakes and missteps,

provided that you do not abandon the path of love and always remain open to God's grace that will both purify and enlighten you".

Pope Francis tells us that "anything done out of anxiety, pride, or the need to impress others will not lead to holiness. We are challenged to show our commitment in such a way that everything we do has evangelical meaning and identifies us all the more with Jesus Christ." This does not mean ignoring the need of moments of quiet, solitude and silence before God. Quite the contrary. The presence of constant inflow of new gadgets, the excitement of travel and an endless array of consumer goods at times leave no room for God's voice to be heard. "How can we fail to realize the need to stop this rat race and to recover the personal space needed to carry on a heartfelt dialogue with God? Finding the space may prove painful but it is always fruitful. Sooner or later, we have to face our true selves and let the Lord enter."

Pope then explains two dangerous trends that exist in today's Church. His concern is that such people think they are getting holier, and in fact what they are thinking and doing actually interfere with true holiness.

The first is called "**gnosticism**," He reminds us that our holiness is not determined by how much we know (whether we can explain theological concepts, for example) but by how deeply we love. So-called Gnostics are "incapable of touching Christ's suffering flesh in others, locked up as they are in an encyclopaedia of abstractions," When somebody has an answer for every question, it is a sign that they are not on the right road." God infinitely transcends us; God is full of surprises. We are not the ones to determine when and how we will encounter God; the exact times and places of that encounter are not up to us." Gnostics who want everything to be crystal clear presume that they can control God's transcendence.

Pope Francis explains a second dangerous trend that exists in today's Church – a contemporary form of **pelagianism** (denial of the doctrines of original sin). Such people may refer to God's grace, but they really trust their own powers, and they think they are better than others because they follow certain rules or remain intransigently faithful (unwilling or refusing to change one's views) to a certain way of being Catholic. We don't

become holy all at once. He says, “The Church has repeatedly taught that we are justified not by our own works or efforts, but by the grace of the Lord, who always takes the initiative. **“Only on the basis of God’s Spirit, freely accepted and humbly received, can we co-operate by our own efforts in our progressive transformation. We must first belong to God, offering ourselves to him who was there first, and entrusting to him our abilities, our efforts, our struggle against evil and our creativity, so that his free gift may grow and develop within us.”**”

Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means **to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes. Mt 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-23.** The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s **Identity Card.** So if anyone asks: “What must one do to be a good Christian?” the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives. The word ‘happy’ or ‘blessed’ thus becomes a synonym for “holy.” It expresses the fact that those faithful to God and his word, by their self-giving, gain true happiness. Let us listen once more to Jesus, with all the love and respect that the Master deserves. Let us allow his words to unsettle us, to challenge us and to demand a real change in the way we live. Otherwise, holiness will remain no more than an empty word.

- *Core Team member*

The Power of Tithing and Almsgiving

Continued from the last issue.....

Test God on Tithing!

The Old Testament Law required the lay tribes of Israel to give a tithe (one-tenth) of their grain, oil, wine, and livestock to the Levites to support them for their spiritual service to the people, because they did not receive a land inheritance like the other tribes (Num. 18:21-24).

This practice of supporting those who provide spiritual leadership carried over into the Christian era as God’s people gave a tithe of their wealth to support the clergy and their ministry. St. Thomas Aquinas points out that

the continuation of this practice is quite fitting, “lest the people of the New Law should give less to the ministers of the New Testament than did the people of the Old Law to the ministers of the Old Testament.”

But on an even more fundamental level, Aquinas sees tithing as an act of justice. Just as a society should provide for the necessities of those who serve them (such as government officials or soldiers), so the people should support the livelihood of those who lead them in worshiping God. To fail to do so would be unjust. According to St. Augustine, the Christian who neglects this duty to tithe “takes what belongs to someone else.”

God Himself says that those who do not bring the full tithe are not simply lacking in generosity: He describes them as thieves, robbing God (Mal. 3:8-10). This depiction makes sense if we see ourselves as stewards. God blessed each of us with a certain amount of wealth, in part, so that we would justly share it with those who serve us. To neglect tithing, however, is to treat our possessions as if they are our own. It is to become like a steward who steals his master’s wealth and does with it whatever he pleases for himself.

The Bible often teaches that we should not put the Lord to the test. But there is one passage in which God Himself commands us to test Him. In Malachi 3:10, God challenges His people to give a full tithe and then trust that He will bless them abundantly for their generosity:

“Bring the full tithes into the storehouse . . . and thereby put me to the test”, says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing”. Putting God first with our finances and giving a tithe is not always easy. But God promises that the person who does will experience “an overflowing blessing.” He wants us to try it—to test Him on this. If we give Him a little more, He will give us much more in return.

“The Gospel on Five Fingers”

In addition to tithing, another way to be a good steward is to give to those in need out of compassion for them in their suffering and out of love for God. This act of mercy is called almsgiving and is one of the essential

religious practices Jesus emphasizes in the Sermon on the Mount. Proverbs 19:17 makes a remarkable statement about almsgiving: “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord.” What does this mean? In what sense is almsgiving giving God a loan?

St. Teresa of Calcutta often spoke about how the Gospel can be summed up on five fingers. While pointing to each finger she would repeat these five words of Jesus: “You-did-it-to-me.” She, of course, was drawing on the famous passage in Matthew 25 about how those who provide for the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the sick perform these charitable acts ultimately for Christ.

When we give to the poor, it is as if we are giving to God, who is especially present in the poor. “Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40).

But still, why would almsgiving be called a “loan” to God? When we loan something to someone, we have an expectation that we will be repaid. Thus when Proverbs 19 teaches that giving alms to the poor is not just a gift, but a “loan” to God, there is an underlying confidence that God will pay us back. That becomes explicit in the second half of the verse: “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and He will repay Him for His deed.

” The Bible once again makes clear that when we generously give to those in need, God will bless us abundantly. Just as the person who tithes to support the Levites would receive “an overflowing blessing,” so the person who gives alms to the poor will be repaid for his deed. Giving alms, thus, serves as an expression of trust that God will “pay us back” with His many blessings.

And the return on investment is startling. In the Gospel story about the “Rich Young Man,” Jesus invites this impressive man to give alms—to sell all he has and give it to the poor in order to receive “a treasure in heaven” (Mk. 10:21). This indeed is a unique call to make a tremendous sacrifice. But notice what Jesus says about the kind of return on investment he would receive: People who give up all to follow Christ will receive “one-hundredfold” in this life and the next (Mk. 10:27-30).

Almsgiving is a tremendous act of faith. Do you really believe what Jesus taught—that when you give to the poor you are giving to Him? And do you really believe that you will be enriched one-hundred fold in this life and receive eternal life if you are generous in your giving to the poor? The person who does not trust Jesus' words about almsgiving will be more likely to hoard his possessions, focus on his own "financial security" and be very cautious about giving to the poor, though not thinking twice about eating out for dinner, going on vacation or getting the latest in cell phone technology.

The person who does truly trust God's word, however, would eagerly give up more of his possessions to help the poor, confident that he will receive from God so much more in return—like the investor who is certain about a stock that will yield a one-hundred fold return. For he knows the Lord is trustworthy and cannot be outdone in generosity.

Catholic sources

For God everything is possible - A Testimony

I praise and thank God for blessing me with 20 more years in my life. My husband died of AIDS in 1999. I too was diagnosed of HIV. My counts were very low. Doctors told me that I would not live for more than two years. My daughter was 6 years old then. I was feeling that she will be left all alone if I too would pass away. Therefore, I always prayed to Jesus to keep me alive till I get my daughter married. My in-laws were also not supporting me but **my Jesus did not leave me alone**, He was always there by my side "See, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is anything too hard for me?" Jer 32: 27. The rent of my parents' house and the fees I collected from giving tuitions, was my only income. With this I would manage to get my medicines, educate my daughter and also our daily bread. My health was improving. My daughter passed B.com and she got a proposal from a good family and I got her married very soon at the age of 22 years. Now she is happily settled in U.K. I am also happy and keeping in good health. Praise and thank you Jesus for your mercy. May God bless you brothers and sisters who prayed for me.

Editor's note: For privacy reasons the person's name is withheld.

Nativity of the Mother of God

We in the Catholic Church celebrate the birth of our beloved mother Virgin Mary on its traditional fixed date of September 8, nine months after the December 8 celebration of her Immaculate Conception as the child of Saints Joachim and Anne. Mary is believed to have been born approximately 20 B.C.

The circumstances of the Virgin Mary's infancy and early life are not directly recorded in the Bible, but other early church documents and traditions describing the circumstances of her birth are cited by some of the earliest Christian writers from the first century.

These accounts, although not considered authoritative in the same manner as the Bible, outline some of the Church's traditional beliefs about the birth of Mary.

It describes Mary's father Joachim as a wealthy member of one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Joachim was deeply grieved, along with his wife Anne, by their childlessness. "He called to mind Abraham," the early Christian writing says, "that in the last days God gave him a son Isaac."

Joachim and Anne began to devote themselves extensively and rigorously to prayer and fasting, initially wondering whether their inability to conceive a child might signify God's displeasure with them.

As it turned out, however, the couple were to be blessed even more abundantly than Abraham and Sarah, as an angel revealed to Anne when he appeared to her and prophesied that all generations would honour their future child: "The Lord has heard your prayer, and you shall conceive, and shall bring forth, and your seed shall be spoken of in all the world."

After Mary's birth, according to the writings, Anne "made a sanctuary" in the infant girl's room, and "allowed nothing common or unclean" on account of the special holiness of the child. The same writing records that when she was one year old, her father "made a great feast, and invited the priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and all the people of Israel."

“And Joachim brought the child to the priests,” the account continues, “and they blessed her, saying: 'O God of our fathers, bless this child, and give her an everlasting name to be named in all generations' . . . And he brought her to the chief priests, and they blessed her, saying: 'O God most high, look upon this child, and bless her with the utmost blessing, which shall be forever.’” The writings go on to describe how Mary's parents, along with the temple priests, subsequently decided that she would be offered to God as a consecrated Virgin for the rest of her life, and enter a chaste marriage with Joseph a devout Jewish man. It was during her engagement that Mary learned through an angelic visitation of the plans God had for her to be the mother of Jesus on earth. Mary responded with faithful obedience to God's plan, despite the personal challenges that it presented to her.

Saint Augustine described the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary as an event of cosmic and historic significance, and an appropriate prelude to the birth of Jesus Christ. “She is the flower of the field from whom bloomed the precious lily of the valley,” he said.

The fourth-century bishop, whose theology profoundly shaped the Western Church's understanding of sin and human nature, affirmed that “through her birth, the nature inherited from our first parents is changed.”

“In the liturgy the Church salutes Mary of Nazareth as the Church's own beginning, for in the event of the Immaculate Conception the Church sees projected, and anticipated in her most noble member, the saving grace of Easter. And above all, in the Incarnation she encounters Christ and Mary indissolubly joined: he who is the Church's Lord and Head and she who, uttering the first fiat of the New Covenant, prefigures the Church's condition as spouse and mother” (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 1).

“In fact, even though it is not possible to establish an exact chronological point for identifying the date of Mary's birth, the Church has constantly been aware that Mary appeared on the horizon of salvation history before Christ. It is a fact that when ‘the fullness of time’ was definitively drawing near — the saving advent of Emmanuel — she who was from eternity destined to be His mother already existed on earth. The fact that she ‘preceded’ the coming of Christ is reflected every year in the liturgy of

Advent. Therefore, if to that ancient historical expectation of the Savior we compare these years which brought us to the beginning of the third Millennium after Christ, it becomes fully comprehensible that in this present period we wish to turn in a special way to her, the one who in the 'night' of the Advent expectation began to shine like a true 'Morning Star' (*Stella Matutina*). For just as this star, together with the 'dawn,' precedes the rising of the sun, so Mary from the time of her Immaculate Conception preceded the coming of the Savior, the rising of the 'Sun of Justice' in the history of the human race" (*Redemptoris Mater*, 3).

- *Compiled*

QUIZ CORNER - QUIZ ON ACTS Ch. 11 to 20

Tick (✓) the right answer

Refer the Catholic New Revised Standard Version Bible

1. According to Acts ch 11 the followers of Jesus who were from Cyprus and Cyrene spoke to the Hellenists in which city?
a. Antioch. b. Damascus. c. Caesarea
2. In Acts ch 11, the Church in Jerusalem sent which individual to Antioch? a. Saul. b. Peter. c. Barnabas.
3. During which feast was Peter arrested in Acts ch. 12.?
a. Unleavened Bread b. Pentecost c. Tabernacle
4. In Acts ch. 13, which was the first place Barnabas and Saul sailed to?
a. Antioch in Pisidia b. Antioch in Syria c. Cyprus
5. In Acts ch. 13, Who at Paphos desired to hear the word of God?
a. Elymas b. Sergius Paulus c. Simeon called Niger
6. In Acts ch. 13, against which city did Paul and Silas shake the dust off their feet?
a. Derbe b. Iconium c. Antioch in Pisidia

7. In Acts 14, God had opened what door to the Gentiles? a. "a door of the Gospel." b. "a door of faith" c. "a door of salvation".
8. According to the decree in Acts 15, which of these is one of the regulations placed upon Christians by the Council in Jerusalem?
 - a. to undergo circumcision.
 - b. to abstain from eating animal that was sacrificed.
 - c. to reject all artwork as idolatry
9. According to Acts 18, which husband-and-wife team did Paul meet in Corinth?
 - a. Ananias and Saphira.
 - b. Aquinas and Prudence.
 - c. Aquila and Priscilla.
10. In Acts 16, where did the Holy Spirit prevent Paul and Silas from preaching? -
 - a. Asia
 - b. Damascus
 - c. Rome
11. Which of these individuals is not listed as one of Paul's traveling companions in Acts chapter 19?
 - a. Gaius.
 - b. Silus.
 - c. Aristarchus.
12. In Acts 20, for what event did Paul want to be in Jerusalem?
 - a. the Days of Awe.
 - b. the Day of Pentecost.
 - c. the feast of Tabernacles.

ANSWERS FOR THE QUIZ ON ACTS Ch. 1 to 10

- 1) b. Galilee 2) b. sound 3) c. Beautiful 4) a. son of encouragement 5) b. grace & power 6) a. the Freedmen 7) c. Devout men 8) b. Jews 9) c. The Italian 10) c. Hellenists.

Hearty congratulations to Jessie Fernandes, Reuben Cardoz, Joanna Alphonso and Susana Pinto for the correct answers. We also appreciate Juliet D'Souza for participating.



***MIPC Prayer Meeting: Every Thursday at 8:00 pm in the Parish Hall.
General Intercessory Meeting: First Monday of every month at 8:00 pm.***