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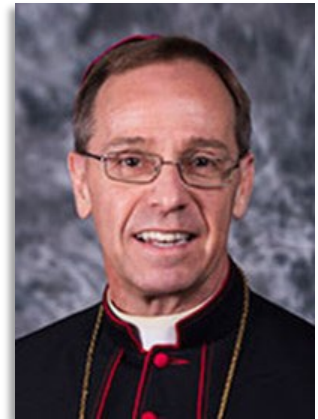
Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Mary shows us how to be holy

On Monday, August 15, we will celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven. Mary's holiness is a model for us all. As the mother of our Lord and our mother, Mary shows us how to be holy. Starting with her openness to the mysterious will of God, which changed her life radically, Mary shows us how to say "yes" to whatever God asks.

Holiness is not something remote or inaccessible. It is close to us, available to everyone. That doesn't mean that it's easy to be holy. It simply means that God reaches out to each of us through the power of his grace and invites us to be our own true selves, the people he created us to be. The obstacles are many—especially our own sinfulness and the temptations of the evil one. But God's love and mercy sustain us and encourage us to grow in wisdom, courage and love.



God does not call us to holiness and then abandon us. He stands with us—closer to us than we are to ourselves—and he walks with us, accompanying us on the journey to true life in him. God gives us the gifts we need to discover and do his will. These include prayer and the sacraments, the inspiration of holy reading and reflection on God's word, and the example of the saints—including "ordinary" people, such as our mothers and grandmothers, who are not perfect, but who are serious about living the Gospel in their daily lives.

As Pope Francis tells us in his Apostolic Exhortation *Guadete et Exsultate* (On the Call to Holiness):

I would like these reflections to be crowned by Mary, because she lived the Beatitudes of Jesus as none other. She is that woman who rejoiced in the presence of God, who treasured everything in her heart, and who let herself be pierced by the sword. Mary is the saint among saints, blessed above all others. She teaches us the way of holiness, and she walks ever at our side. She does not let us remain fallen, and at times she takes us into her arms without judging us. Our conversation with her consoles, frees and

sanctifies us. Mary our Mother does not need a flood of words. She does not need us to tell her what is happening in our lives. All we need to do is whisper, time and time again: 'Hail Mary...' (Gaudete et Exsultate, #176).

We, too, can be holy. We can live the Beatitudes to the best of our ability. We can open our hearts to Jesus and accept both the joys and the sorrows of his way of life. We can trust in God's mercy so that when we fall short of his hopes for us we can beg for forgiveness and rejoice in his saving grace. We can turn to Mary our Mother at any time, and she will guide us to her son, Jesus. We can whisper her name day in and day out, and she will show us how to be holy.

Holiness is not something that is reserved for people who are "better than us." It is for us. As Pope Francis says:

Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the saints are joyful and full of good humor. Though certainly realistic, they radiate a positive and hopeful spirit (Pope Francis, Gaudete et Exsultate, #122).

As the pope also says, "When in God's presence we examine our life's journey, no areas can be off limits. In all aspects of life, we can continue to grow and offer something greater to God, even in those areas we find most difficult." All we need to do is "to ask the Holy Spirit to liberate us, and to expel the fear that makes us ban him from certain parts of our lives" (Gaudete et Exsultate, #175). God knows our secrets and the hidden burdens we carry in our hearts. Let's ask him to set us free!

Let's turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary and ask her to intercede for us so that we, too, can say "yes" to God's will. Let's ask her to show us how to live the Beatitudes of Jesus and grow in holiness in every aspect of our daily lives. "In this way," Pope Francis tells us, "we will share a happiness that the world will not be able to take from us" (Gaudete et Exsultate, #177)

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Catechism of the Catholic Church on the Role of Mary

Mary - Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church

963 Since the Virgin Mary's role in the mystery of Christ and the Spirit has been treated, it is fitting now to consider her place in the mystery of the Church. "The Virgin Mary . . . is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer. . . . She is 'clearly the mother of the members of Christ' . . . since she has by her charity joined in

bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head."⁵⁰² "Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church."⁵⁰³

964 Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. "This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death";⁵⁰⁴ it is made manifest above all at the hour of his Passion:

Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, joining herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim, born of her: to be given, by the same Christ Jesus dying on the cross, as a mother to his disciple, with these words: "Woman, behold your son."⁵⁰⁵

965 After her Son's Ascension, Mary "aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers."⁵⁰⁶ In her association with the apostles and several women, "we also see Mary by her prayers imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation."⁵⁰⁷

. . . also in her Assumption

966 "Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death."⁵⁰⁸ The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son's Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians:

In giving birth you kept your virginity; in your Dormition you did not leave the world, O Mother of God, but were joined to the source of Life. You conceived the living God and, by your prayers, will deliver our souls from death.⁵⁰⁹

. . . she is our Mother in the order of grace

967 By her complete adherence to the Father's will, to his Son's redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary is the Church's model of faith and charity. Thus she is a "preeminent and . . . wholly unique member of the Church"; indeed, she is the "exemplary realization" (*typus*)⁵¹⁰ of the Church.

968 Her role in relation to the Church and to all humanity goes still further. "In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Savior's

work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace."⁵¹¹

969 "This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation . . . Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix."⁵¹²

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

(A selection from the Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exultate (On the Call to Holiness))

31. We need a spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelizing efforts, so that every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord's eyes. In this way, every minute of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness.

32. Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self. To depend on God sets us free from every form of enslavement and leads us to recognize our great dignity. We see this in Saint Josephine Bakhita: "Abducted and sold into slavery at the tender age of seven, she suffered much at the hands of cruel masters. But she came to understand the profound truth that God, and not man, is the true Master of every human being, of every human life. This experience became a source of great wisdom for this humble daughter of Africa".[30]

33. To the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world. The bishops of West Africa have observed that "we are being called in the spirit of the New Evangelization to be evangelized and to evangelize through the empowering of



all you, the baptized, to take up your roles as salt of the earth and light of the world wherever you find yourselves”.[31]

34. Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace. For in the words of León Bloy, when all is said and done, “the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint”.[32]

My Prayer for You

Let us turn to Mary, who rejoiced in the presence of the Lord, and who treasured everything in her heart. Help us to grow in holiness, Blessed Mother. Do not let us remain in our sins when we stumble and fall, but lift us up by your example and walk with us as we continue on our journey to your Son, Jesus. Amen.

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