

THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS

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Any call from God begins with God, deriving from God's love for every person. A true call is never initiated by a person or anything a person does. God does not force a response to the call. The choice of whether to respond and then how to respond is made by each individual. The grace of prayer draws all deeper into a relationship with God, and that grace itself is a gift from God.

The call of all to believe in God is further refined by the call of God to respond in a particular way in faith. God's call to Abraham and through him to the Hebrew people set them apart from the rest of humanity. We, as members of the Catholic Church, are spiritual descendants of the first chosen people of God. For all the baptized, there is a special call that involves both a growth in the interior union with Christ as well as in the exterior actions typified in acts of charity, mercy, and justice. All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love.

This call to holiness is rooted in the fact that by Baptism, we become adopted sons and daughters of God. In Baptism we are given the grace to be able to grow in holiness and to reflect more completely that we are, in fact, created in the image and likeness of God. Since we are a part of God's family, we are called to reflect the familial characteristic of holiness. Baptism is the true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit. With Baptism comes the responsibility for personal perfection (Mt. 5:48) that requires extension to the communal perfection of the Church.

Called and willing to respond, inspired by life in the community of the Church and the world, baptized persons are formed by grace through prayer, fidelity to Scripture and tradition, a vibrant sacramental and liturgical life, and membership in a community which bears witness to the Gospel. The rich tradition of Catholicism provides resources for both private and communal religious experiences to draw hearts nearer to God who calls in love. The call to total commitment derives from an awareness of the relation between the person and God as well as an awareness of the relation between the person and the Church and the world. In both vertical and horizontal dimensions, discussion of vocation is characterized by "open, respectful and cordial dialogue, yet accompanied by careful discernment and courageous witness to the truth."

All people who live a life focused on responding to the call to holiness and the call to discipleship are living out the common vocation of all. In Baptism we are given the grace to be able to grow in holiness and to reflect more completely that we are, in fact, created in the image and likeness of God. All baptized Catholics share in the universal call to holiness, and each person is called to live that call in a particular vocation. Some are called to marriage, some to single life, some to consecrated life, some to ordination. The quest for holiness draws everyone to a life of prayer and a life of service to others. Prayer and service intersect in the liturgy of the Church, the sum and summary of Catholic Christianity (CCC,1327). A call to a particular state is not something that carries with it degrees of holiness, but there are degrees of responsibility and service in each of the particular states.