

PENTECOST *Today*

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Editorial

by Ron Ryan

A glimpse of the face of God

This issue is about holiness—a difficult thing to describe. Spiritual directors, retreat masters and writers have been trying to put it into words for millennia, some having succeeded better than others; but holiness itself—in word and in deed—remains beyond the grasp of most of us.

We sometimes recognize it when we see it—but not always. We can identify it in people like Mother Theresa, Padre Pio, and the singularly faithful women and men we occasionally encounter. But the lives of the saints are peppered with stories of the times they were ridiculed, rejected and even persecuted because of their holiness. Francis of Assisi was mocked by his townsfolk; John of the Cross was imprisoned by his fellow Carmelites; Dorothy Day was stymied in her efforts by her own bishop.

We sometimes do not recognize holiness because it looks so different from what we expect it to be. It can easily be confused with foolishness, because it is the living out of the message of the cross, which Paul reminds us is folly to this world (1 Cor. 1:23). It is sometimes seen as subversive because the Gospel itself is radical. Holiness almost always makes us uncomfortable.

Perhaps the reason why holiness is difficult for us to recognize, and why it is so disconcerting, is because it is a glimpse of the face of God. In the vision of Isaiah, the prophet wails in fear and the seraphs themselves cover their faces as they behold the One they describe as “holy, holy, holy” (6:3). The holiness we perceive in others is a reflection of

the Holy One, our God whom the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us is infinitely beyond our understanding (n. 42).

And yet holiness is not foreign to our nature. After all, we are created in the image and likeness of God. Our call as children of God and as disciples of Jesus Christ is to be holy as our heavenly Father is holy, to reflect in our own way the face of the One who has created us and given us a share in the Holy Spirit.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit gives us a glimpse of the face of the all-holy creator. It enables us to overcome our fear and discomfort, to open ourselves to our awe-inspiring God, and to be immersed in the Father’s love.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit also gives us a glimpse of ourselves—our true identity—as daughters and sons of the One who is holy. We sense that there is more to our lives than what we have yet experienced, a freedom and joy to life that we have yet to know. And we come to realize that the Holy Spirit that we have been given is at work empowering us to live out our identity as holy people. If we cooperate, our lives “grow brighter and brighter, as we are turned into the very image that we reflect” (2 Cor. 3:18).

In doing so, we will probably make some people around us uncomfortable. They may think us foolish or radical. We may be ridiculed and rejected. But in our joy and graciousness, may we help them catch a glimpse of the face of God—and a hint of the beauty of their own reflection. ♦

PENTECOST Today

Executive Director

Walter Matthews

Editorial Board

Fr. Art Cooney, OFM Cap.

Dr. Michele Greischar

Virginia King



Editor

Ron Ryan

Production Manager

Jean Beers

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NSC-Chariscenter USA

PO Box 628

Locust Grove, VA 22508-0628

Tel. (540) 972-0225

www.nsc-chariscenter.org

National Service Committee members:

Aggie Neck (Chairman)

Dcn. William Brennan

Josephine Cachia

Fr. Art Cooney, OFM Cap.

Dr. Michele Greischar

Rosbel Hernandez

Virginia King

Fr. Richard Loch

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HOLINESS

The Charismatic Renewal and the call to holiness

by Mark H. Nehrbas

More than ten years ago Fr. Michael Scanlan, T.O.R., gave a teaching to our charismatic covenant community entitled “Knowing God’s Will.” The thought he shared has been etched in my mind ever since. He said, “If you want to know God’s will for your life, it can be found in 1 Thessalonias 4:3. ‘It is God’s will that you should be holy.’”

But what does it mean to be holy? For years prior to and shortly after Vatican II, many people in the church didn’t think too much about holiness. Lay people were not reading the Bible and simply followed the teachings of the nuns in Catholic schools or CCD classes. We learned that it was a mortal sin not to fulfill our Sunday obligation by attending Sunday Mass. It was important to go to confession once a month or so. As long as we didn’t commit a big sin (or quickly went to confession when we did) we were okay and we were probably going to make it to heaven.

We thought holiness was for the priests and nuns who lived the celibate life.

Because of God’s mercy many of us in the Renewal have experienced the Spirit’s power to overcome our sinfulness and to live a life growing in holiness.

The promulgation of the teachings of Vatican II and the fresh experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit began to change all that. There was a powerful coming together of the institutional and the charismatic elements of the church in the late sixties.

Vatican II clearly defined holiness and put out a clarion call to the laity. The Church Fathers wanted us to know that “all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 40). Vatican II made it clear that even lay people were called to holiness. No longer were we able to avoid our responsibility to live a holy life by saying, “that’s for the priests and the nuns.”

At the same time, God’s lay faithful, many clergy, sisters and brothers were experiencing a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. People were discovering a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to change their lives. The Spirit was working to change people’s lives by empowering them to leave a life of sin and providing the desire and grace to live a life of faith and righteousness. ►

When I was 19 (in 1971) I was living a very sinful life. While traveling the country searching for meaning, I met a fellow college student. He shared the Gospel with me and I surrendered my life to the Lord. As soon as I finished praying the prayer of commitment to Jesus, I had a sense that the life I was leading was “the darkness” and Christ was “the light.” When I prayed for baptism in the Holy Spirit later that day, I received the release of the power of the sacraments to change me and to live a righteous life. I did not understand that as a call to holiness at the time, but in my heart I wanted to stop doing what was wrong. The Holy Spirit was already beginning to help me.

Holiness is a call from God to be transformed from our sinful tendencies and behaviors into tendencies and behaviors that are more God-like. Dr. Alan Schreck says holiness is the action of the Holy Spirit instilling “in people the virtues and character of God” (*Hearts Aflame*, p. 89). It is not just getting rid of sin in our lives, although that is necessary. It is also the positive living out of a life that is more God-like.

Scripture and church tradition tell us that the Holy Spirit is the “Sanctifier” (see *Dominum et Vivificantem*, Pope John Paul II), the one who makes us holy. It is because of the merits of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we can become holy; but it is the Spirit who lives in our hearts that makes us holy.

Pope John Paul II refers to the sanctifying work of the Spirit many times in his writings. He spoke on this topic during a Wednesday general audience in December 1990. Referring to the apostles gathered with Mary in the upper room, he said: “From that time until the end of time, that holiness, the fullness of which is always Christ from whom we receive all grace (cf. Jn. 1:16) is bestowed on all those who open themselves to the power of the Holy Spirit through the apostles’ teaching. As the apostle Peter said in his Pentecost discourse, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).”

The Spirit first helps us to grow in holiness by showing us our sin. Jesus, referring to the Spirit in John 16:8, says, “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin, and righteousness and judgment.” We need to see our sin and repent of it in order to grow in holiness. Sin blocks our ability to see God and worship him. It also blocks our ability to receive the new life that God has for us.

But the Spirit does more than just show us our sins. He also leads us to repent of them and fills us with the very life of God. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Rm. 8:10-11). This is not something we can do on our own power, because we are sinners incapable of restoring a right relationship with God. Only Jesus can make us righteous with God (see Rm. 5:19).

Excerpts from *Lumen Gentium*

Christian married couples and parents, following their own way, should support one another in grace all through life with faithful love, and should train their children (lovingly received from God) in Christian doctrine and evangelical virtues. Because in this way they present to all an example of unflinching and generous love, they build up the communion of charity, and they stand as witnesses and cooperators of the fruitfulness of mother church, as a sign of and as a share in that love with which Christ loved his bride and gave himself for her.

In a different way, a similar example is given by widows and single people, who can also greatly contribute to the holiness and activity of the church.

Those who engage in human work, often of a heavy kind, should perfect themselves through it, help their fellow citizens, and promote the betterment of the whole of human society and the whole of creation. Indeed, with their active charity...they should imitate Christ who plied his hands with carpenter’s tools and is always working with the Father for the salvation of all; and they should rise to a higher sanctity, truly apostolic, by their everyday work itself. (n. 41)

Because of God’s mercy many of us in the Renewal have experienced the Spirit’s power to overcome our sinfulness and to live a life growing in holiness. “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

Finally, the power of the Spirit continually works in us so we can bear the fruit of love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (see Gal. 5:22). If we possess these in our lives, we will be holy indeed!

It is not always easy to be open to God’s grace to grow in holiness. There are times when we will fail. But I am so grateful for the gifts of the teaching of our church and the power of the Holy Spirit!



God truly gives us all that we need to live the life of holiness that is pleasing to him. ♦

A member of the National Service Committee, Mark Nehrbas serves as interim Vice-President for University Relations at the Franciscan University of Steubenville.

Test of faith

LOSS

and the call to holiness

by Karen Archer

“Duc in altum!” In his apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II echoes the call to faith that Jesus gave to his apostles to “put out into the deep.” He calls the faithful to step out in faith and open our hearts to the tide of grace, and thus allow the word of Christ to flow through us in all its power.

I was reflecting on this passage from Luke 5 where Peter and the disciples were returning from fishing all night. Jesus comes aboard and tells them to set out again and to drop their fishing nets. I imagined them looking around at each other and mumbling, “What does he know? He’s not a fisherman...just the son of a carpenter...doesn’t he know we’re tired? We’ve been out here all night and we want to get home to bed!” But Jesus, sensing their hesitation, persisted. “Drop your nets; put out into the deep; have faith.”

Can you imagine that, too? Can you think about the times in your life that Jesus has challenged you to put out into the deep? Where the call to faith has been far more than you imagined? Can you place yourself in the boat—grumbling? I can.

I can place myself there on a May morning in 1983 when my son, Christopher, was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 2. I picture myself grumbling as he went through treatment and I worried about him and wondered, “Where is God?”

It is easy to get discouraged when things are going badly. But we need not lose heart because we know that God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of pain and suffering.

I can place myself there in December 1987 when we learned that my daughter, Kelley Anne, who had just celebrated her first birthday, was also diagnosed with cancer. I heard the call to faith from Christopher’s oncologist, now Kelley Anne’s doctor, reminding my husband, Jim, and me of the faith that carried us through Christopher’s illness—how we needed to step out again and have hope for Kelley Anne and to expect God to work.

I can picture myself on that boat on the morning of May 19, 1992, when I woke to find Kelley Anne had gone to eternity while she lay sleeping in my arms.

I can picture myself there in September 1992 when we learned that Christopher had relapsed.

I can picture myself there on the evening of January 16, 2000, with the family gathered around Christopher, his father holding him in his arms, Chris holding my hands, caressing them to his face, as he struggled with his last breath.

I can put myself there each day as I struggle with the reality that the circle of human life was broken in my family, that two of my children have already gone to be with their eternal Father.

How do we respond to that call when challenged time and again? It is easy to get discouraged when things are going badly. But we need not lose heart because we know that God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of pain and suffering.

Luke’s gospel goes on to say that when they threw out the nets they were overwhelmed by what they caught. We, too, were overwhelmed. We were blessed with communities that supported us and family and friends that held us together. And our children were blessed. Christopher sailed through treatment with little or no side effects and went into a remission that lasted for almost ten years. Kelley Anne grew in faith and by the age of five came to know Jesus as her Lord and savior. She showed me what simple faith is like—to be childlike before the Father and to desire Jesus no matter what!

See *Loss* page 13



Pilgrimage to holiness

by *Francee Karpiej*

It was 1989 when we first made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and to see the words of Scripture come alive. On one occasion we visited the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was arrested. I prayed and reflected deeply about the agony of our Lord in the garden, but my heart was not moved. The pilgrimage then led us to the house of Caiphas, the High Priest, where Jesus was taken after his arrest. We came to a place where prisoners were kept. It is believed that this is where Jesus was held overnight. It was a small pit hewn out of rock. A cold, damp, dark place.

When traveling to places made holy by blessed men and women, we gain a broader understanding of our own pathway to holiness.

Our group of pilgrims stood shoulder to shoulder in this stone-cold holding place. We looked above our heads to the hole in the ceiling which, in those days, was

the only way in and out of the pit. The guide turned out the light for a moment to give us a deeper sense of how Jesus might have felt there that night. A silence overcame us. I heard someone read from Psalm 88: "For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave. I am counted among those who go down to the pit. I am like a man without strength" (v. 3, 4).

It was here I encountered Christ. Here, I wept and experienced a deeper conversion of heart. It seemed for the first time I understood what Jesus endured for me—for my sins. Abandoned by his friends, he was thrust into a dark, dreary pit. Alone, Jesus cried out to God, his Father. In some mystical way, I related to his human weakness and suffering and I knew deep inside that he truly related to mine.

I was not prepared for such an internal experience that would call me deeper into my faith. Nor was I prepared for the subsequent

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Spiritual
Formation

Joy Joy Joy

by Dorothy Ranaghan

"A sad saint is a sorry sort of saint." This stinging remark of St. Francis de Sales reminds me of St. Augustine's zinger, "A Christian should be an alleluia from head to toe." Are these sainted men asking the impossible? What is Christian joy? I remember reading once that Christian joy is not a vague, fuzzy, unknowable reality, but "as hard and real and as clear as the New York skyline seen from the New Jersey shore." Yet in a few brief and tragic hours last September 11th, we saw what could happen to the New York skyline, and how easily such certainties can be marred by terror, fear and distress.

The Spirit is the smile of the Father on the face of Jesus, in whose presence "is the fullness of joy."

We know joy has come into the world. Having found him, can we avoid sorrow and suffering? Never. But Francis de Sales issues this firm reminder: "We may be excused for not being always in good spirits, for no one has such control over cheerfulness as to be cheerful at will. But it is inexcusable for us not to be pleasant, agreeable and considerate at all times. This is always in the power of our will. And to overcome a contrary humor and inclination, it is only necessary to resolve to do so." These are tough words, but true. They are not true because of the firmness of our will, however, but because of the mercy of God's provision. He has sent his Holy Spirit.

God knew that living the life he was calling us to would be difficult, and so he put his very own joy into us so that it would be possible for us to live as his followers. In John 17:13, Jesus says that he wants to share his joy with us to the full. Just as his teachings were not just his own but were of and from the Father, so too his joy, his disposition, was of and from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the disposition of God. The Holy Spirit produces an abundant harvest in

our lives. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. To Jesus and to us, the Father says, "God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness." This oil of gladness, this Spirit, makes it possible for us to begin to understand the text of Scripture that calls us to rejoice in the Lord always.

It is the Spirit who helps us to keep our wills united with that of our Father. Turmoil is a red flag that alerts us to a misalignment of our will. Jesus went through turmoil in Gethsemane, but having surrendered, he went with great serenity to Calvary. If the foolishness of joy in the midst of sadness is a scandal, it is the foolishness of the cross of Jesus.

In John's gospel, chapter 15, verse 11, Jesus says, "I have told you *this* so that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete." Since we want complete joy, we need to know what is *this* of which he speaks. It is that we keep his commandments. And Jesus makes sure we know precisely what he commands: "This is my commandment; love one another as I have loved you" (15:12). Christ's way to joy lies in giving himself away.

We too will experience joy in giving ourselves in love. In fact, its opposite brings sadness. Sick and sad people are often too self-absorbed, too lacking in humility to see humor in anything. Good psychologists recognize that one of the signs of mental illness is a rigid or brittle disposition with no room for mirth. Cheerfulness is a way of loving others. If we form a habit of cheerfulness, it is not so that we will feel better, or because we are Pollyannas, but because cheerfulness makes families places of joy and openness. Cheerfulness makes hospitality a true welcoming of others, and it aids evangelization. No one is attracted to a sourpuss. We can't be fishers of men unless we are juicy, happy-looking bait! We are not supposed to be what Bob Mumford once called "the white knuckle club of Christianity," holding it all together by sheer force and strain, but we are to be joyous and free. Saints excel at it—think of St. Lawrence on the rack—showing an ability to laugh at one's circumstances no matter how difficult, while surrendering to God's will in all things.





Spiritual Formation

The Spirit is the smile of the Father on the face of Jesus, in whose presence “is the fullness of joy.” The words to a simple song many of us have sung before remind us that in the presence of our God we will find joy both now and forever. Joy “is a flag flown high from the castle of my heart when the king is

in residence there.” It is an image that comes from the time of medieval castles where the custom was to fly a flag when its resident was at home. We have similar customs today. In the wake of terrorism, as patriotism was high in the United States, flags flew everywhere to remind the whole world that we would not be defeated. In the United States, a flag flown at half-mast means someone is dead. The Christian flag of joy should never be at half-mast. Jesus, the king of our castle, is both joy to and Lord of the world, and he is risen and alive.

If the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives in us, then the joy of the Lord will be our strength. Though our lives and circumstances are filled with fear, difficulty, pain, suffering or terror, the flag of our joy will be up and flying high for the whole world to see—and believe. ♦

Dorothy Garrity Ranaghan is a founding member of the People of Praise Community.

A former member of the National Service Committee and former editor of the Chariscenter USA Newsletter, Dorothy currently does writing and retreat work. She and her husband, Kevin, live in South Bend, Indiana, and have six children and seven grandchildren.



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Joy

Teaching Outline

- A. Joy has come into the world in the person of Jesus.
- B. The world tries to rob us of joy.
- C. We can experience and maintain joy because of the Spirit.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit.
- D. Christ's joy manifested itself in self-emptying love, and we are commanded to do the same.

Cheerfulness is possible and is a way of loving.
- E. In Jesus' presence is the fullness of joy and our strength.

Discussion Questions

1. Is Christian joy possible in this world? Why?
2. What does joy look like in daily life?
3. What is the relationship between joy and love?
4. What kind of sign are we to the world?