

## Part 1: God Calls you to holiness

***“For I, the Lord, am your God;  
and you shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy...  
You shall be holy, because I am holy.”***

**Leviticus 11:44-45**



Where do you see yourself—and God—in the picture above? Let your heart and imagination enter into the scene. May God who has raised up Christ bless us to be witnesses to the new creation in Christ.

Pray slowly and attentively this prayer for Part 1:

***“O God of love, quiet me in your presence. Help me to be aware of your life-giving energy, your Holy Spirit living within me. The Holy Spirit connects me with you, with all creation, with all who are dear to me. Bless all with your love. I make this prayer through Jesus Christ who shows me how to love.”***

Remember: you are holy because God is holy. Keep this in mind! How aware are you of your own spirituality? Your spirituality is who you really are in your deepest and truest self in relation to God, other people, and all of creation.

Another way of looking at your spirituality is to see it as wholeness, your wholeness. And amazingly enough, wholeness is holiness. Holiness is wholeness lived within God's love.

In one passage (Matthew 5:48) Jesus links human holiness with God's holiness: “You must be perfect [merciful, loving, holy] as your heavenly Father is perfect [merciful, loving, holy]”. This passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount doesn't demand the impossible as it seems on first reading. How could you be as perfect as God? "Perfect" doesn't mean the personality fault of perfectionism but rather it means being most fully the person God wants you to be. You are called by these words to be as fully yourself as God is fully God.

Holiness means wholeness. If you are as fully developed a human being as possible and live within the context of God's love, you are truly yourself.

Elizabeth Johnson describes the holiness of ordinary persons in everyday life. Holiness does not mean only ethical holiness, but rather "it is a participation in the very life of God, thanks to the Spirit of God given in baptism."

"All Christians in whatever state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and thus holiness is conducive to a more human way of living even in society here on earth." (Constitution on the Church #40)

Take a few moments to experience in your heart how God loves you and is present to you right now. Ask yourself:

- When have I encountered God today in the midst of my activities?
- How have I responded to God's loving presence today?

Psalm 84 describes how you can be at home with God. Make yourself comfortable and rest in God by reflecting on these words:

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!  
My soul yearns and pines for the courts of the Lord.  
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (verses 1-3).

God's dwelling place, God's court, is where you are right now. God's dwelling place is within you--and outside you.

Look again at the picture of the sunrise, which can remind you of Easter. All of creation, both Heaven and Earth, are God's dwelling place. God is present EVERYWHERE. Reflect on God's presence for a few moments, and thank God for all of life.

Now turn your attention closer to home. Look around the room you are in, look out the window, think about your family and friends, look forward to the activity you plan for a few minutes from now. How is God present to you in this place, these persons, your plans?

In the words of a simple hymn:

"We are one with the heart of each other.  
We are one with the heart of love.  
We are one with the heart of creation.  
We are one with God."

Review this part of this retreat, "God calls you to holiness." This call is to come closer to the God who loves you and shares divine holiness with you. Your entering into God's holiness is made possible by the GOD WHO LOVES YOU AND DELIGHTS IN YOU.

## Part 2: Finding God in Creation



Look reflectively at this picture of the heavens. Marvel at the technology that makes such a photo possible and even more at the universe itself. Recent developments in all branches of science can leave us breathless as we realize the ever-expanding magnitude of creation. Let your imagination marvel in wonder at God's creation and at our human ingenuity.

**"O gracious God, open our hearts and our eyes to the wonder of your presence among us. May we see the signs of your beauty within and around us. Help us to reach beyond ourselves and to give thanks for all of your creation: peoples of every nation, animals of every species, all forms of vegetation, the planets, stars, and galaxies. We pray this in union with the Incarnate Word of God."**

As far back as the fifth century St. Augustine wondered at the immensity and beauty of the natural wonders. He observed: "I asked the earth, the sea and the deeps, heaven, the sun, the moon and the stars...My questioning of them was my contemplation, and their answer was their beauty" (The Confessions of St. Augustine, X, vi).

Sixteen centuries after Augustine the Earth Charter (approved in 2000 by UNESCO) challenges us to respect and care for the community of life. In the second paragraph of the Preamble we are reminded: "Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the condition essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust."

Perhaps you don't know all the intricacies of modern science or contemplate beauty as deeply as Augustine did. But you can find God in nature. You know that God is everywhere. You can find God when you are surrounded by the beauty of nature--whether looking at a glacier in Alaska, standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon, or when you stand by a lake shore or in a woods or in your own backyard.

Reflect on how these places give you an incentive to pray, experiencing God's presence:

- watching the sun play over the water, the loon dive into the wave for fish, the light pricking through the dark night sky;

- listening to the gentle breeze or the rough wind blowing through the trees;
- feeling the cool water lapping at your feet as you sit on a dock or the warmth of the sun on your face;
- smelling lilacs in the spring or the grasses along a lakeshore—or the dead fish there;
- hearing the roll of thunder or the cardinal singing in the backyard.

God frequently speaks to us through nature. Growing in appreciation of the wonder of the natural environment can help you to deepen your spirituality.

For the people of the Bible God was in the mountains and the desert, in the cool breeze and in the storms. The age-old prayers that are the psalms show how the Israelites were constantly aware of God's creation. They wondered at God's works and gave praise. The nature imagery used in the psalms describes the world as they knew it.

The poetic prayers of the psalms can help you to be more contemplative as you grow in knowing, loving, and experiencing God in creation. Take time to look up and pray some of these psalms. For instance, Psalm 8 begins with these lines: "O, Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name over all the earth! You have exalted your majesty above the heavens...."

Psalm 84 opens with these words: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!"

In Psalm 148 the psalmist asks all of creation to join in praising God: "Praise the Lord from the heavens...."

Now it is your turn to praise. In the next few days try to find God in all that you see. Spirituality today calls for a new relationship with the whole of creation, not dominating or ruling over the earth but recognizing the dignity and rights of all species. In treating all creation with reverence and respect you can acknowledge your connection with everything in the universe.

This ecological consciousness can help you to appreciate the wonders of the natural environment and to recognize the interrelatedness of all things. Ecological spirituality teaches that the goods of the earth exist for all people. Learning to become increasingly aware of its sacredness is a matter for prayer and action.

Gerard Manley Hopkins in his beautiful and challenging poem, "God's Grandeur," captures a sense of ecological urgency. He begins with this line, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God," and then shows how human beings have "bleared," "smeared," and smudged their world. But the final verse shines with a hopeful spirituality:

**“And for all this, nature is never spent:  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—**

**Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."**

When you consider God's creation with eyes of faith, you can see signs of grace everywhere. Sacramentality isn't limited to the traditional seven sacraments but to anything that raises our hearts and minds to God.

How do you see a concern for the environment as part of your spirituality? What do you do to keep your part of the universe healthy for future generations?