



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE SYMPOSIUM PROMOTED BY THE
DICASTERY FOR THE CAUSES OF SAINTS**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 6 October 2022*

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

I am pleased to meet you at the conclusion of the Symposium on “Holiness Today”, organized by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. I thank Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Dicastery, and the other Superiors, Officials, Postulators and staff. My greetings go to all of you who have come from different parts of the world to take part in these days of study and reflection, which have been enriched by the contribution of distinguished speakers representing the areas of theology, science, culture and communications.

The theme chosen for the Symposium reflects the desire of the Apostolic Exhortation [*Gaudete et Exsultate*](#) “to re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities” (No. 2). The call to holiness is central to the teaching of the [Second Vatican Council](#), which devoted an entire chapter of the Constitution [*Lumen Gentium*](#) to the universal vocation to sanctity. The Constitution states that “all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his or her own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father himself is perfect” (No. 11). Today too, it is important to appreciate the sanctity present in God’s holy people: in parents who raise their children with love, in men and women who carry out their daily work with dedication, in persons who patiently endure sickness and infirmity, and in the elderly who keep smiling and sharing their wisdom. The witness of a virtuous Christian life given daily by so many of the Lord’s disciples represents for all of us an encouragement to respond personally to our own call to be saints.

Alongside, or better, amid this multitude of believers that I have called “the middle class of holiness” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 7), there are those whom the Church presents to us as models, intercessors and teachers. These are the beatified and canonized saints, who remind everyone that it is possible, and indeed rewarding, to live the Gospel to the full. For holiness is not primarily a matter of struggle and renunciation, a kind of “spiritual workout”, but something very different. First and foremost, it is the realization that we are loved by God and freely receive his love and mercy. This divine gift inspires gratitude and enables us to experience an immense joy that is not a fleeting emotion or mere human optimism, but the certainty that we can face every challenge with the grace and the assurance that come from God.

Without this joy, faith shrinks into an oppressive and dreary thing; the saints are not “sourpusses”, but men and women with joyful hearts, open to hope. *John Paul I*, recently beatified, provides an example of this holiness teeming with good humour. Blessed Carlo Acutis is likewise a model of Christian joy for teenagers and young people. And the evangelical, and paradoxical, “perfect joy” of Saint Francis of Assisi continues to impress us.

Holiness arises from the concrete life of Christian communities. Saints do not come from a “parallel universe”, but are believers who belong to God’s faithful people and are firmly grounded in a daily existence made up of family ties, study and work, social, economic and political life. In all these settings, the saints strive constantly, without fear or hesitation, to carry out God’s will. It is important that each particular Church recognize and value the examples of Christian life that have developed within God’s people, who have always had a particular “instinct” for recognizing these models of holiness and outstanding witnesses to the Gospel. There is a need, then, to take into due consideration people’s consensus regarding these exemplary Christian lives. The faithful, by God’s grace, are endowed with a genuine spiritual sense that enables them to identify and recognize in the concrete lives of certain baptized persons a heroic exercise of Christian virtues. The *fama sanctitatis* does not come primarily from the hierarchy but from the faithful themselves. It is the people of God, in its various components, that gives rise to the *fama sanctitatis*, that is, the common and widespread opinion regarding the integrity of a person’s life, perceived as a witness of Christ and of the Gospel Beatitudes.

However, it remains necessary to verify that this reputation for holiness is spontaneous, stable, enduring, and spread throughout a significant part of the Christian community. It is indeed genuine when it resists the changes of time, the fashions of the moment, and continues to produce salutary effects for all, as can be ascertained by popular devotion.

In our days, suitable access to the media can bring about a better knowledge of the Christian life of individual candidates for beatification or canonization. However, in the use of digital media, and the social networks in particular, there can be a risk of exaggeration or misrepresentation dictated by less than noble interests. Consequently, there is a need for wise discernment on the part of all those who examine the contours of the reputation of holiness. One piece of evidence for the *fama*

sanctitatis or the *fama martirii* remains the *fama signorum*. When the faithful are convinced of the holiness of a Christian, they have recourse – at times massive and impassioned – to his or her heavenly intercession; the fact that God hears their prayers represents a confirmation of this conviction.

Dear brothers and sisters, the saints are precious pearls; they are always alive and timely. They never lose their importance, since they provide a fascinating commentary on the Gospel. Their lives are like a catechism in pictures, an illustration of the Good News that Jesus brought to humanity: the message that God is our Father, who loves everyone with immense love and infinite tenderness. Saint Bernard said that the contemplation of the saints in heaven filled him with “burning desire” (*Sermo 2; Opera Omnia, Edit. Cisterc. 5, 364ff.*). May their example enlighten the minds of the women and men of our time, reviving faith, enlivening hope and kindling charity, so that everyone may feel drawn to the beauty of the Gospel, and no one may wander amid the gloom of meaninglessness and despair.

I do not want to conclude without mentioning an aspect of holiness to which I devoted a brief chapter of my Exhortation *Exsultate et Gaudete*: a sense of humour. It has been said that a sad saint is a sad excuse for a saint. Approach life with a sense of humour, for enjoying the things in life that make us smile is good for the soul. There is a prayer that I encourage you to pray – I have prayed it every day for over forty years. It is the prayer of Saint Thomas More. Oddly enough, in praying for holiness, he starts off by saying: “Grant me, Lord, good digestion, and also something to digest”. He goes straight to the point, but in a humorous way. You can find the prayer in [Note 101 of *Gaudete et Exsultate*](#), so you can pray it yourselves.

It is my prayerful hope that the insights and proposals of your Symposium will assist the Church, and society as a whole, to perceive the signs of holiness that the Lord never ceases to raise up, at times even in the most unthinkable of ways. I thank you for your work and I commend it to the maternal intercession of Mary, Queen of All Saints. I bless you from my heart. Cardinal Semeraro already committed you to praying for me, so I will say no more. He already said it all. Thank you.