

THE CHURCH IS HOLY



Once prophet Isaiah was praying in the temple and he had a vision. He saw the Lord seated on a throne. The hem of his robe filled the entire temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings; with two he covered his face and with two he covered his feet and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke (Is. 6:1-4). This vision of Isaiah is one that reveals God's holiness.

God is holy and it was to this holiness that Israel was called.

Israel is the holy people of God. The same is true of the Church, the new Israel. Holiness is the fundamental characteristic of the Church. Paul, the apostle, in his letters often addresses Christians as those who are holy in the Lord or those who are called to holiness in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:2, Rom 1:7).

All are Called to Holiness

It is God's will that we all become holy. We read in Leviticus: “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: you shall be holy, for I the Lord,

your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). Apostle Paul reminds us: “For God did not call us to impurity, but in holiness” (1 Thess. 4:7). God created us to share in His holiness as we read in Ephesians: “.....Just as He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1:4). Again St. Peter reminds Christians: “...Instead, as He who called is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15); Hence we are all called to holiness and we should be so.

The Church is Holy, and yet to be Sanctified

The Church is at once holy and yet to be sanctified. She is constantly being sanctified through repentance and conversion. (LG 8). **The Church is a community called by the most high God, who is Holy, and dedicated to His service. The holy one, God, is dwelling in the Church. The Church is being led by the Holy Spirit.** The Church is also enriched by the presence of so many holy people in it. All these factors account for the holiness of the Church. However we should not forget that members of the Church are also sinners and weak mortals. In the letter to the Hebrews we read: “Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled” (Heb. 12:14-15). This word of God refers to the importance and need for keeping holiness in our lives.

Sanctification through Jesus

In the Old Testament, the Blood of the lamb that was sacrificed in expiation of sins could sanctify the temple, the altar and the people. **In the New Testament, Jesus, the Lamb of God, purifies us through his blood. It was his sacrifice on the cross that liberated us from the power of the evil one, sanctified us from sin and made us God's children.** It was to lead us to the holiness and perfection of the Father that Jesus became the sacrificial lamb.



Sanctification through the Word of God

The Word of God has the power to sanctify us. Jesus said: “**You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.**” (Jn. 15:3). A leper who came to

Jesus for healing said: "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean." Seeing his faith, Jesus said to him: "Be made clean." (Mt. 8:3). **Any one who heard and paid heed to the words of Jesus became clean both physically and spiritually.** Before leaving this world and going to the Father, Jesus prayed to his Father for all of us: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." (Jn 17:17).

"Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" asks God (Jer. 23:29). Gold is purified in fire. The longer it melts in fire the purer it becomes. In the same way when we receive the Word of God, which is like fire, and carry it out in our lives, we become purified and clean. "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16-17). **The members of the Church can walk on the path of holiness by reflecting on the Word of God prayerfully everyday and living it out during the course of the day.**

Sanctification through the Sacraments

Sacraments are the means for the sanctification of the Church. They are the streams of divine life established by Jesus. **God sanctifies every phase of human life through various sacraments. He specially sanctifies our bodies and souls through the holy sacrifice of the Qurbana everyday.** The fathers of the Church teach us that, just as God sanctified the prophet Isaiah, who cried out to Him that he was unworthy, with a burning coal taken from the altar, we are sanctified by the burning coal that is the Holy Eucharist. The Church Father St. Ephrem says: **"Those who receive the Holy Eucharist are filled with the Holy Spirit and fire and consequently they are sanctified."**

The Altar is the symbol of Holiness in a Church. The priest, during the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, announces to the people, that the holy **Eucharist is meant for those who are holy themselves**



and the people in response affirm that only the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are holy. This response of the worshiping community is indicative of the unworthiness of the people on the one hand and on the other, their participation in the holiness of the Triune God.

On occasions when we get away from God's holiness on account of our sins, we should receive the sacrament of reconciliation and regain the divine life and the strength to keep away from sins.

Sanctification through the Sacramentals

The Sacramentals help us to grow in holiness. **They prepare us to receive God's love and kindness and assist us in our growth in holiness.** The sacramentals are rituals that sanctify the members of the Church, in their varying states of life, situations, places and things they use.

Sanctification through Prayer, Fasting and Abstinence

Prayer, fasting and abstinence are also means for sanctification. **In prayer we meet God; we come to know His will for us.** Through prayer we can confess our weaknesses and limitations before the Almighty God and gain strength and confidence. Anyone who prays sincerely is greatly strengthened against falling into sin or in case of failure, he gets back to the path of holiness quickly through repentance. Through fasting and abstinence we make amends for our own as well as for others sins. Fasting gives us the strength to keep away from the situations of sin.

Sanctification through Our Vocations

Perfection of love is attained and holiness is achieved, by fulfilling faithfully the duties pertaining to each one's state of life. Any state of life in the Church is a divine vocation. Whatever is the state of life, when one moves forward on the path of perfection of love according to his / her state of life and inspire others to grow in holiness, the holiness illuminates (LG 39). In a way the works entrusted to one's care can also be seen as a divine call. Through this we get an opportunity to participate in the creative, redeeming and sanctifying works of God. They become means of holiness for us when we lovingly co-operate and creatively respond to the call of God and the works entrusted to us.

Thus we become holy when we are nourished by the Word of God, the sacraments, the sacramentals, prayer, fasting and abstinence and live according to our divine call.

**Word of God
to Read and
Meditate**

Jn. 17:15-26

Word of God to Remember

Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct;
(1 Pet. 1:15).

Let us Pray

Jesus, you called us to holiness.
Now help us become really holy.

My Resolution

As I am called to holiness,
I shall do my best to be holy.

To Think with the Church

It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society. In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that, following in his footsteps and conformed to his image, doing the will of God in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbour. Thus the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the life of so many saints.

(Vat. II, The Church, No. 40)

To Know the Mother Church

After the death of Kariyattil Ouseph Metropolitan, Paremmakal Thomma Kathanar took over the administration of the Church as the Governor. During his administration efforts were made to restore the identity of the Church. One of the important steps in this direction was the gathering of eighty-four church men at Angamaly on the 1st of February 1787. They prepared a document called 'Padiyola', in which they enumerated the entire sacrifices made by the Mar Thoma Christians ever since the death of Mar Abraham.

Questions

1. Explain how God revealed his holiness to the prophet Isaiah?
2. Why do you say that the Church is holy?
3. What are the means of sanctification in the Church?
4. How do the vocations become the means of holiness?
5. How do abstinence, prayer and fasting help us grow in holiness?