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Chapter 1
Called to Holiness

Thirst for Christ

There is a spiritual thirst, as we read in one of the psalms: “I thirst for the living God, when will I appear before him?”

As he says “I thirst,” our Lord is thirsting for return to his Father. The night before, at the Last Supper, he prayed to his Father and asked for the glory that was his before the foundations of the world were laid. He told his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them. Now he has this thirst, to return again to his Father.

Applying that spiritual thirst of our Lord to ourselves, what is it that we have if we love the Lord? We have a thirst for holiness. We want to be saints. We want to be happy, to be at peace on the inside, to be one with the Father.

What is sanctity? Sanctity is Christ living in me so that his mind possesses my mind and I am governed by his truth. That’s sanctity. He’s in my will, and all things that are pleasing to him I do. He’s in my body, so that my body becomes a tabernacle.

Sanctity is not only Christ in me, it’s making Christ known to others. It’s being loveable. It’s making Christ loveable. When others see us, they see Christ.

— Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Called to Be Perfect

Every Christian, regardless of his or her state of life, profession, or circumstances, is called to holiness, to the fullness of the Christian life, and to the perfection of charity. Jesus Christ himself exhorted us to seek perfection, the ultimate goal of our call to holiness: “‘You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’”

Perfection is indeed a lofty goal, one that is impossible to achieve in this life. Christ, nevertheless, calls each of us to strive for perfection.

In fact, God created us to share in his perfect and divine life, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares at its outset:

> God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Savior. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life. (CCC 1)

To perfect ourselves in holiness means to imitate the example of Christ—to love, to show mercy, and to forgive others just as God loves us, is merciful to us, and forgives us.

In the Gospels, when a rich young man asked Christ how he could attain eternal life, Christ told him to keep the Commandments. When the man persisted in his question, stating that he had obeyed the Commandments all his life, Christ invited him to take the next step: “‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’” The journey toward perfection is one not only of external obedience but also of the interior life, and it requires nothing less than becoming a true follower of Christ by committing one’s life completely toward the service of God and neighbor.

The *Catechism* says this about Christ’s invitation to the rich young man to “be perfect”:

> This reply does not do away with the first: following Jesus Christ involves keeping the Commandments. The Law has not been abolished, but rather man is invited to rediscover it in the person of his Master who is its perfect fulfillment. (CCC 2053)

To perfect ourselves in holiness, then, means to imitate fully the example of Christ.

Holiness, however, requires more than simple mimicry of Christ’s attributes, more than mere obedience to the Commandments; it requires a true relationship with God. We are called not only to obey his will but also to know him personally and intimately.

It is impossible to keep the Lord’s commandment by imitating the divine model from outside; there has to be a vital participation, coming from the depths of the heart, in the holiness and the mercy and the love of our God. Only the Spirit by whom we live can make “ours” the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. 5 (CCC 2842)