

Homily for UAC 17th anniversary Mass (31 October 2020)

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Pallottine Family,

We are celebrating the 17th anniversary of the confirmation of the erection of the Union of Catholic Apostolate on the solemnity of All Saints. Rightfully, therefore, we have chosen the theme “The Universal Call to Holiness”.

Carlo Acutis, who died of leukaemia in 2006 aged 15, was beatified in the town of Assisi on 10 October 2020. This teenager recorded Eucharistic miracles online and helped run websites for Catholic organisations. He has already been called "the patron saint of the internet". We were all inspired by the incredible life-story of this teenager.

As we all remember well, the Rite of Beatification of Elisabetta Sanna took place in the home parish of Elisabetta in the Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, in Saccargia, Codrongianus, Sardinia, on Saturday 17 September. This humble, handicapped mother of 7 children, a lay member of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, was declared a saint.

The Catholic Church has declared saints from all walks of life: monks, hermits, kings, queens, mothers, fathers, young, old, rich, poor, religious, priests, missionaries and martyrs. " We are all called to be saints," Pope Francis told pilgrims at the General Audience in St Peter's Square on 19 November 2014. But, he said, we must remember that holiness is a gift from God - not something we can achieve on our own. Holiness is not “granted only to those who have the opportunity to break away from the ordinary tasks, to devote themselves to prayer.” Rather, everyone is called to holiness in their own state of life. “Indeed,” he said, “it is by living with love and offering Christian witness in our daily tasks that we are called to become saints... Always and everywhere you can become a saint, that is, by being receptive to the grace that is working in us and leads us to holiness.”

Chapter Five, “The Universal Call to Holiness”, of the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* takes up the matter that all who believe in Jesus Christ regardless of their vocation in life are called to holiness. At first, this might not seem to be so radical a concept; however, prior to the Council there existed within the Church a certain consensus among priests, religious and the laity that only the first two groups were specifically called and set aside to attain holiness. Chapter Five put an end to this line of thought.

United to Christ as his bride, the Church is “indefectibly holy” and, therefore, everyone who is part of the Church “is called to holiness.” Holiness is expressed in many ways in each individual’s particular way of life. Significantly, the document states that it is through the sacrament of baptism, and not holy orders, that all are called to “perfection in charity” and to be holy people.

What Does it Mean to be Holy? Following in Jesus’s footsteps in order to become more like Jesus is the path to holiness. Every Christian must seek God’s will in all matters and devote themselves to love of God and service to their neighbour by utilizing their own personal gifts in the duties, circumstances and conditions of their life.

To be holy, then, is to be about placing God above all else. It is about opening oneself to the desires of God and placing oneself in the hands of God. In holiness each person comes to realize that one’s life is not about her/his self but about following the projects and plans of God. It is not always easy to know the will of God. In the words of Thomas Merton, “My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me ... and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.”

The Church in *Lumen Gentium* tells us that in order to know God’s will we are to hear the Word of God, use the sacraments, participate in liturgy, pray, give of ourselves in self-giving love and exercise the virtues. For each person the voice of God can be heard in whatever prompts that person to greatest love, greatest justice, greatest truth and greatest self-gift. Again Merton: when faced with a difficult decision, the voice of God can probably be found in the one that calls for greatest self-gift.

Of special concern to the Council was that married couples and parents follow their own proper path to holiness. Married couples and parents are “a sign and a participation in that very love with which Christ loved his bride,” the Church as they sustain one another in grace throughout their lives, welcome their children in love and teach them their faith.

Elsewhere, the Council says in *Gaudium et Spes* that Christians are called to holiness through engagement with the world. In a particular way the well-being of individuals and society is intimately connected to the health of marriages and family life. Families can achieve holiness when together they hear the Word of God and heed it in their daily activities.

As we can see, these are the very ideas of our Founder too. He prophetically dreamt of them much before the Vatican II. That is the greatness of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. Pallotti says: "To everyone God has given the commandment to procure the eternal salvation of his neighbour; and in fulfilling such a precept we must imitate Jesus Christ the Apostle of the Eternal Father. Therefore the life of Jesus, which has been his apostolate, must be the model of apostolate for everyone. As all are called, or rather obliged, to imitate Jesus Christ, all, in proportion to their condition and state, are called to the apostolate" (OCC III, p. 142) (Ratio 139).

Therefore, the fundamental purpose of all formation is described by Pallotti in these terms: "so as not to turn back but to imitate ever more perfectly the Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ in order to cooperate effectively in the works for his greater glory and the greater sanctification of Souls" (OCC VII, pp. 63-64). Since this is an obligation for all Christians, each according to their condition and vocation, needs to be formed in this way (Ratio 46).

The Apostolic exhortation on the call to holiness in today's world, "*Gaudete et Exsultate*", Pope Francis says, "Yet with this Exhortation I would like to insist primarily on the call to holiness that the Lord addresses to each of us, the call that he also addresses, personally, to you: "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:44; cf. 1 Pet 1:16). The Second Vatican Council stated this clearly: "Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord – each in his or her own way – to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect" (10). The living of the Beatitudes is the way to attain holiness.

The eight beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount reveal the path from selfishness to holiness, according to Pope Francis. He added: "The path of the Beatitudes is an Easter journey that leads from a life according to the world to a life according to God, from an existence guided by the flesh -- that is, by selfishness -- to one guided by the Spirit."

Pope Francis celebrated Mass in Rome's Verano cemetery in Rome on 01 November 2015. From the Sermon on the Mount, the pontiff charts the course for the life of a good Christian to achieve holiness and happiness. "Dear brothers and sisters", Francis concluded, "this is the path of holiness, and it is also the path to happiness. It is the path Jesus has taken, indeed, He is the Way: those who walk with Him and through Him enter life, eternal life. We ask God for the grace to be simple and humble, the grace to be able to cry, the grace to be meek, the grace to work for justice and peace, and above all the grace to leave it up to God to become instruments of His mercy . So did the Saints, who have gone before us to the heavenly homeland. They accompany us on our earthly pilgrimage, encouraging us to move forward. May their intercession help us to walk the path of Jesus and obtain eternal happiness for our deceased brothers and sisters, for whom we offer this Mass."

In the first reading the author of the Apocalypse describes "a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue" (Revelation 7:9). This people comprises the saints of the Old Testament, beginning with Abel the just and the patriarch Abraham, and then those of the New Testament, the many martyrs at the beginning of Christianity, the blessed and the saints of the ages that followed, and finally the witnesses of Christ in our own time. What was common to them was the will to incarnate the Gospel in their existence through the impulse of the Holy Spirit, who is the eternal giver of life of the people of God.

In the second reading, St. John reminds us of our supreme vocation in these words: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3).

We therefore arrive at the Gospel of this feast, the proclamation of the beatitudes that a short while ago we heard echo in this church.

Jesus says: Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the afflicted, the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, blessed are the pure of heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted for the sake of justice (cf. Matthew 5:3-10).

In truth, the blessed par excellence is only him, Jesus. Indeed, he is the truly poor in spirit, the afflicted, the meek one, the one hungering and thirsting for justice, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemaker; he is the one persecuted for the sake of justice.

The beatitudes show us the spiritual physiognomy of Jesus and thus express his mystery, the mystery of death and resurrection, of the passion and the joy of the resurrection. This mystery, which is the mystery of true blessedness, invites us to follow Jesus and thus the way to happiness.

In the measure that we accept his proposal and follow him - everyone according to his own circumstances - we too can participate in his beatitude. With him the impossible becomes possible and in the end the camel passes through the eye of needle (cf. Mark 10:25); with his help, only with his help, we are able to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (cf. Matthew 5:48).

Dear brothers and sisters, we now enter into the heart of the Eucharistic celebration, the stimulus and nourishment of holiness. In a short while Christ will become present in a higher way, he who is the true vine to which are united, as branches, the faithful on earth and the saints in heaven.

In the juridical commentary Fr. Hubert Socha explains the responsibility of the Ecclesiastical Assistant towards the Union as to be a spiritual director. As such, the Rector General of the Society of Catholic Apostolate, in close collaboration with the President of the Union, is to care for the preservation and deepening of Pallottine spirituality in the entire Union as well as to guarantee the spiritual and apostolic formation of all the members of the Union. Therefore, the appeal that I wish to make to the whole Pallottine Family today is to strengthen our spiritual foundation.

The Union is grounded in the incomprehensible and mysterious love of the One and Triune God: Each of its members is uniquely and constantly challenged to direct themselves towards divine perfection which surpasses all human ideas and expectations, while at the same time opening themselves to the diverse and ever-changing needs of the people and spheres to whom the apostolate of the Union applies. The Union thus participates in the universal mission of the Church to cooperate with God and with one another in order to gather all people together with Him .

The immensity of God, the diversity of the members of the Union and of those to whom it is to serve, and the need to work together from the outset and to use all the means at our disposal, all this requires that all candidates for admission to the foundation of St. Vincent Pallotti be solidly prepared and that all their members have lifelong opportunities for formation.

The actual actor in the introductory and permanent formation is God himself. The purpose of this formation is to form apostles in and for the Church. Like Jesus, the apostle of the eternal Father, they are sent to help the sisters and brothers to open themselves to God's presence and work. Doing this the members are urged by His love and support each other (cf. GSt art. 2, 6-7, 12, 17-24, 41 para. 2). Formation in Union thus serves to spread, deepen and consolidate the original charism given to Vincent Pallotti and which the Church has made her own (cf. GSt art. 1 and 46) .

In 1832, St. Vincent wrote in his *Month of May for Lay People*: “Do you want a perfect example of the perfection of the heavenly Father? You have it in Jesus. He became man to teach men and women how to live their lives in holiness and perfection...Look, therefore, in faith at your divine model, Jesus Christ. Profit by the treasures of the grace that He gained for you through His holy life. You will then become as holy and perfect as your Heavenly Father” (XXXI). This is our wish and prayer today for all the members of the Union.

Let's therefore concentrate on a deep spiritual and apostolic formation in the spirit of St. Vincent Pallotti, which is the formation in the spirit of Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father. If we do such a formation, then the Union will truly become a communion of all the faithful with same dignity and responsibility, deeply rooted in charity, and strongly apostolic and missionary in its dynamism. Without such a profound spiritual foundation, we can only create some sort of a human organisation, with plenty of discussions and planning of projects. The key is to strive for Christian holiness, following the spirit of the beatitudes. Thus we will become sons and daughters of God, with our destiny to join all the saints in the heavenly Jerusalem to sing together: “Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” (Apocalypse 7:11)

Jacob Nampudakam SAC
Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Union