

# The Universal Call to Holiness and Prayer

## *Reflection for St. Anthony de Padua Catholic Parish Lenten Mission*

TUESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT - MARCH 19, 2019 BY MARY STUTZMAN

I saw Father Bob's list of 25 things to do during Lent, and I just want to see a show of hands of how many of you took him up on his cold "Scottish" showers. Now I am going to give everyone a chance to really stretch their arms ...raise your hand if you want to be happy. That's pretty unanimous, isn't it? Well, God wants you to be happy too!

During our homeschooling years, a big part of our religious instruction came from the Baltimore Catechism. I would sit and snuggle on the couch with my kids and quiz them every Friday on that week's catechism, helping them to memorize it word for word. One of the questions was, "What must we do to gain the happiness of heaven?" They would rattle off, "To gain the happiness of heaven we must know, love, and serve God in this world."

So, beginning at a very young age, I taught my children these simple truths. It's so simple, yet many people today would rather be their own god and follow their own path to happiness. The reality is that it is only by knowing, loving, and serving God in this world that we achieve eternal happiness. I know we are talking about two kinds of happiness here: the everlasting happiness of heaven and happiness that we all want here on earth. But I believe that the desire for one leads to the fulfillment of the other.

I would like to quote Father Glenn Kohrman, one of our diocesan priests who has a very simple saying: "Happiness is holiness." So if that is true, and I believe it is, then the happiness that we seek, both here and in the life to come, comes by living the universal call to holiness now.

Lent is a great time to pick this apart--the goal of Lent is holiness after all.

- First, I am going to show you how begin to recognize the presence of God in your life and how this leads to a desire for holiness.
- Then I am going to give you some ideas of what holiness might look like in your life.
- Finally, I am going to show you how the universal call to prayer ultimately helps us live out this life of holiness.

Our call to holiness must be purposeful. And I say it starts by recognizing the presence of God in your life. You may think you are having accidental encounters with Christ-- good days where we feel at peace and in harmony with God. But I don't believe these are accidents. I like to call them "God things." Things like nearly missing a fender-bender...an unexpected check in the mail that

comes just when that bill is due....bumping into someone at the grocery store whom you need to reconcile with but have been avoiding.....reading a bumper sticker that speaks to your heart. My life has been full of these “God things”. It’s funny, I used the term so much while my kids were growing up that started rolling their eyes at me. But I will give you some examples.

I’ve won lots of things, like a new refrigerator, the \$50 prize in a jingle contest at our credit union which then inspired me to try another essay contest where I won the grand prize of \$20,000. We added on to our house years ago and our budget ran short at the end and we didn’t have the \$600 we needed to finish the floor. Soon after that, we got a card in the mail with \$600 cash in it. This is what it said, .... Just this winter, we needed a new refrigerator and stumbled onto the exact one that we wanted. Someone else had ordered it and changed their mind. This \$2000 refrigerator was marked \$688. Our son, Adam said, “You sure have good luck with refrigerators, mom!”

God things haven’t always been wrapped in ribbons and bows though. Two years ago, I tripped on a box and broke my big toe while volunteering at the Women’s Care Center. Through a very strange series of events, this led to the discovery of a tumor on my kidney. I was told almost 100% of these are cancer. Two weeks later, I had the kidney removed and the tumor biopsied. The tumor ended up being a very rare type—a type the surgeon had never seen before—so rare that there had been only 100 like it ever reported in the medical books. And it was benign.

My sister had to go through shoulder surgery twice after injuring it and then falling on it again. During testing before the second surgery, they discovered an aneurism on her heart. She is having open heart surgery soon, and I say it was a God thing that she reinjured her shoulder; otherwise, they would never have discovered the aneurism. So, what seemed like a terrible thing ended up possibly saving her life.

You know what is amazing? Those kids who used to roll their eyes at their old mom because I was convinced that God had His hand in everything are now seeing “God things” in their own lives.

My son Matthew is in the army. He sent me this text message recently: “This guy at the gym just came up to my buddy and me and asked if we believed in Jesus and my buddy said not really and I said yes and the guy made us hold hands and he spoke from the heart for like 2 minutes praying for us and our families and our careers and before he walked away he hit a machine 3 times and said, ‘if you knock, He will answer.’ Now that’s a God thing.”

My son Jacob and new wife had just bought their first home and soon found out they needed a new washer and dryer. The next day, Jacob ran into a professor from college who asked how the

kids were doing. When Jacob told him their plight, his professor said, “That’s funny. I have a set that’s for sale. I was just getting ready to post the ad.” Jake said, “That was a God thing!”

Our daughter Sarah and her husband are expecting their fourth child and have gotten very good at recognizing the hand of God in their lives. They had an old roof on their house and gutters and soffits that needed replaced. This winter, their neighbor’s tree fell on their house during a wind storm, taking part of the soffits and roof with it. Everything that they would have struggled to pay for was covered by their homeowners insurance.

Our son, Greg, sent me this text last month when I told them about our refrigerator “God thing”: “Your fridge God thing reminded me about my shed God thing. I remember doing a ton of research on which shed to buy. I had found the one at Lowe’s for \$998. It was February last year and I had worked midnights at work because of an issue there. I woke up around 1 pm and something told me to look on the computer and to buy my shed that day. When I did, Lowe’s had it on sale for \$198. I couldn’t believe it and ran to the store to purchase it. The lady at the desk said there was no way the price was right because they never sold one that cheap before. She checked and said there was indeed one left and the price was correct. I attribute that “feeling” to look at the shed that day to God rewarding me for something.”

These are all wonderful stories of times when my family and I saw God working in our lives. Now I know there will be people who think that these are just random acts, or that God is only interesting in helping people with appliances. What I am saying is that God is there if you just pay attention!

When you begin to recognize God in your life, you begin to see your Savior not just as some far off distant being, but as someone who is walking with you. So that when you have bad days, days when you hurt emotionally, spiritually, physically, you know that He is still there. Through noticing God-things, He has become real to you—someone you can thank, someone you can talk to, someone you can have a relationship with. So I challenge you first to start looking for “God things” ....share them out loud with your family and friends. So what if they think you are a little “crazy!” Be joyful! Help THEM to see God things for themselves.

Now, once you have this sense of God’s presence in your life, your natural tendency is to want to live a life that would be pleasing to him. That’s where the Universal Call to Holiness comes in. So what might that look like in your life:

If you parenting children....there are so many opportunities to grow in holiness

First of all, since today is the Feast of Saint Joseph, I ask you fathers to place yourselves into the hands of this humble saint. It is tough in today's world to lead your families to holiness, but it is your responsibility as fathers to do just that. St. Joseph would be a great role model and intercessor.

1. I used to print off a saint quote on a piece of computer paper every week and tape it on the wall at the bottom of the stairs. It was the first thing the kids would see in the mornings as they made their way to the breakfast table, and I would change it every week. This week it's Mother Theresa's quote: "If you judge people, you have no time to love them." One day, my son's girlfriend bought me a pretty picture frame and some dry erase markers. She had noticed those quotes and thought the markers would make the task easier. That same girl ended up converting to Catholicism and married our son; they just had their third child last month.
2. Turn the TV off and read aloud the Little House on the Prairie Books or the Chronicles of Narnia, one chapter a night.
3. Spend Saturday morning doing chores as a family; I used to print off a chore list every Saturday and put an initial next to each chore. All six of my kids learned how to clean toilets, dust, sweep, and scrub. You might not think that doing chores is holy, but it really fostered a spirit of cooperation, and I think that it is important at an early age to teach children that we serve God by being servants to each other, and this starts right at home. That service can then move out into the parish and community.
4. Teach your children how to properly say, "I'm sorry". (Formula: I'm sorry for \_\_; are you ok? I won't do it again.....I forgive you.)
5. Another way that you can instill holiness is by creating holy routines. We had a morning routine where we would gather around the mountain of clean laundry at the landing at the top of our stairs. We had a list of prayers that we would say; we'd read the saint of the day; and then each child would dig into the laundry, pull out their own items, fold them, and put them away. Then they would make their beds. We had this luxury in the morning because we homeschooled, but it could easily be done in the evening.
6. Gather your children around your bed at night, and kneel in prayer with them. We used to say the Angel of God prayer, say something we were thankful for that day, and we would end with silent time to reflect on our sinfulness that day and say an Act of Contrition. I'd like to share a wedding gift thank you note that I received from my daughter's childhood friend recently. "I think back to what an impact you made on my childhood. Thank you for

showing me how to raise a family in the Catholic Church as well as the importance of prayer as I distinctly recall kneeling around your bed to state what we are thankful for.” Such a small thing it seemed at the time. But this 30-year-old remembered it.

7. I never missed an opportunity to show them how to live the Catholic faith on a daily basis. My goal was to weave it into the fiber of their being. The best way to do this is through the sacraments, like going to confession as a family or attending an evening or early morning Mass together during the week. My son Jacob will tell you that there were two things that he recalls while growing up that have helped him be the man of faith that he is today. One was going to confession once a month (or more, if someone needed it). The other was push-ups. He is the proud daddy of a one-month old and says he will be incorporating these things in his parenting.
8. Teach your children the works of mercy. One way is to have them make holiday cards and pass them out at nursing homes. You could also put together goody bags with a toothbrush, deodorant, snacks, a water bottle, and a cheery note, and have them ready to hand out the window to a person on a street corner who’s asking for help.
9. Sacred Time—set out a basket and have everyone put their phones/electronic devices in the basket every day from 6-8 pm or 7-8 pm. What this says to your children is “You are more important than anything that’s going to come through my phone during our Sacred Time.”
10. Make a ring of flowers and crown your Mary statue on May 1. We always had a little procession outside and sang to her before crowning her.
11. Have your kids participate in their church youth group activities.

Now, I have the most experience with the parenting stage, but this fall our 6<sup>th</sup> child will be going off to college and we will be moving into the next phase—the empty nest! If you are middle-aged or retired and are past the child-rearing years, then your call to holiness will look a little different.

- You might be called to use your free time in your parish or community, places like the Right to Life Organizations, Women’s Care Centers, Knights of Columbus, or a local soup kitchen or food pantry.
- Maybe bake fresh bread or cookies and take them to that grouchy neighbor who no one ever visits.

- When you plan your vacations, try incorporating visits to religious shrines or Cathedrals in your travel plans.
- Put down that best-seller and pick up a book on the life of a saint. Two I would recommend are St. John Vianney or Saint Rita of Cascia--their lives read like adventure stories.
- If you are a grandparent, spend time with your grandkids and let them see you living your faith. Treat them to a church benefit dinner. Grandmas, buy beads and string and teach your grandkids how to make rosaries. Grandpas, make a birdhouse with your grandchild and teach them all about God's beautiful creation. Skype them or facetime them if they live far away, and read Bible stories and the lives of the saints to them that way.
- How about sending cards to people on your prayer list at church, saying, "Someone is thinking of you!"
- You could practice the works of mercy by:
  - mentoring at a local grade school
  - go through your closet and donate unused clothing
  - next time you're in a drive-thru line, pay for the food for the car behind you
- Instead of your usual radio station, try tuning into Redeemer Radio, 95.7. Same with TV—tune into EWTN instead of your usual programming.
- You might even do what my dad has done. He is 88 years old and he wrote his autobiography. Believe me, if you are in your 80's, you have a story to tell! Write about your earliest memories, the things that have shaped you, the people who have touched your life, what your Catholic faith has meant to you. Write it down so your grandkids can read it someday.
- Make sure your friends have the same values. It doesn't help you become holier if you are hanging around with people who lead immoral lives or use bad language.

What it boils down to is that when we are being Christ for one another, we are being holy. And that holiness, once it blossoms in us, is the only way to know happiness here on earth. It's not from having the latest toy or gadget, the fanciest sports car, the largest diamond...our happiness doesn't come from any of that stuff. It comes from being holy. Remember what Fr. Glenn says: "Happiness is holiness."

Another way for us to live out this call to purposeful holiness is to develop our prayer life.

I think if we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that we could all use a little less noise in our lives and a little more prayer. It's easy to make excuses about why we don't pray. Many people say they just can't find the time to pray—they're just too busy. Saint Francis de Sales said "Everyone of us needs half an hour of prayer every day, except when we are busy—then we need an hour." You see, people were using the excuse that they were too busy back in the 1600's too! Speaker and author Matthew Kelly says, "It you don't have time to pray and read the Scriptures, you are busier than God ever intended you to be." So, just like our call to holiness has to be purposeful, so does our call to prayer. We have to on purpose seek out God in prayer.

For me, one of the best habits that I have ever started was the quiet time that I have carved out first thing in the morning. I set my alarm 30 minutes before I need to "get busy" and I sit down in my "prayer spot" with a cup of coffee and a yogurt and I go through my little stack of prayer books. The ones I enjoy the most are the ones with different readings every day. If you are looking for God things, this is a sure place to find them. I will never forget the day I was told I had kidney cancer. The next day was Ash Wednesday and I woke up thinking, "Well, this is going to be some Lent, huh God?" I curled up in my prayer spot and opened one of my prayer books, Jesus Calling by Sarah Young. And this is what I read, "When something in your life or thoughts makes you anxious, come to Me and talk about it. Bring Me your prayer and petition with thanksgiving, saying: 'Thank You, Jesus, for this opportunity to trust You more.' Though the lessons of trust that I send to you come wrapped in difficulties, the benefits far outweigh the cost."

Was it a coincidence that those were the exact words I needed to read that morning? Would I have thought to THANK GOD for the cross he had just placed on me had I not read those words? Of course not. So there it was...another God thing. If you are not already doing this, it is a great way to start a purposeful prayer life. I suggest starting with the daily Mass readings. You can read them on your phone if you don't have a printed copy. Also, Word Among Us has a great daily meditation on the daily readings which you can also find online. If you are not a morning person, then try quieting your mind with some spiritual reading at bedtime with a cup of tea or a glass of wine. (Of course, don't tell Fr. Bob if you drink the wine during Lent☺.)

But don't get stuck on the idea that prayer has to be this set time when you are reading prayers out of a prayer book. I love what St. Therese says about this.

"Apart from the Divine Office, which, although unworthy, I have the happiness of reciting, I do not look for beautiful prayers in books; there are so many that they make my head ache. Besides it is so difficult to choose between them, as each is more beautiful than the other, so that I do like little children who cannot read: I tell my Heavenly Father what I have to say, and He always

understands. It seems to me that prayer is just the raising of one's heart and an upward glance to Heaven, a cry of love and gratitude in the midst of trials just as much as in joy. It is the being lifted on to a higher, supernatural plane, where the soul is enlarged and united to God."

So let's explore some other ways to add prayer to your life:

- Turn off the radio and talk to God on your way to work or the grocery store. You might pray a rosary or just talk to God out loud about your day and what's on your heart. I do this with my 17-year old as we drive in to Mass during the week. We spend a few minutes saying some prayers together, and then I talk to God about our day, family concerns, things in the news. He knows that the radio comes on AFTER we pray.
- Maybe you can attend Mass one extra day a week; check the bulletin at yours or neighboring parishes for a daily Mass time that might fit your schedule.
- Try this way of adding prayer to your day. When you're in that annoying long check-in line at the clinic, say a Hail Mary over the head of every person in line; and if you run out of people in line, start going through the check-in clerks too. Those poor people are coughed on all day long! This also works once you get to the crowded waiting room, or in line at the grocery store, and in traffic jams. It turns a time that's usually frustrating into a holy time of prayer.
- Start a prayer journal. Especially if you are hurting, this is a great way to express yourself and open lines of communication with God. If you want to be more public with your thoughts, try a blog post. My niece is using a blog to write about her experience with losing their first baby to anencephaly, and it is a powerful example of how writing down your thoughts can bring peace.
- Incorporate prayer into your exercise routine—pray while doing yoga or pray a rosary while taking a walk or bike riding.
- Go on a retreat. If it is not possible for you to physically get away, try an at-home retreat using the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.
- Sing a worship song! I like to sing while I am hanging clothes on the clothes line or making dinner. You can turn mundane chores into prayer with a little singing. And since singing is praying twice, you get a double-whammy there!
- Try fasting, even when it's not Lent. It is a powerful form of prayer. Jesus himself taught that only prayer and fasting had special power to cure a man possessed by a demon. So, if



you are already praying for a special intention, try adding a day of fasting to your prayer efforts.

- Find a prayer buddy—someone whom you can count on to pray for your intentions while you promise to pray for theirs. Maybe you could attend Mass and pray a Rosary together afterwards. Sometimes it's nice to know that there is someone else praying on your intentions with you.
- Set your alarm on your phone for noon every day, and pray the noon Angelus.
- Pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Do this with your family! This website **therealpresence.org** lists churches by state and their times for adoration. This is a great way to work in visits to Jesus on out-of-town excursions and vacations. St. Mary's--I take each class, from preschool to high school into our Adoration Chapel and have an age-appropriate worship service with them. It can be an awkward experience for someone who has never sat with Jesus in adoration before. I love the story that St. John Vianney tells about a peasant who spent a lot of time praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament. When the saint asked him what he was doing, he answered, "I look at Him and He looks at me." It can really be just that peaceful...that simple.
- Try a new style of praying with the Scriptures such as Lectio Divina.
- Pray the Stations of the Cross during Lent, at home or at different churches.

*The idea is to have purpose.*

You have to purposely look for His presence in your life during the good times and the bad, because trust me, He's there. You have to purposely want to grow in holiness. You have to purposely spend time with God in prayer. You have to purposely try to become a holier family. God is calling you to this. If we are going to be the happy people that God intends for us to be, then it's time to answer his call to holiness and prayer.