

HOLINESS IS ESSENTIAL

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations,

Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

Take Up & Read:

[1 Kings 3: 5-15](#)

[1 Thessalonians 3:11-13](#)

Ponder this:

What if, here and now, as summer comes to a close and we look ahead to a new academic year and the briskness of autumn's quickened pace, we take some time to consider what is truly essential? What if we intentionally set about to craft a life that is mindful of the one thing that is important? What if we did everything, from this moment forward, for God's glory?

And what if we did it with the presence of mind to recognize in every moment that God's glory is the outward sign of His holiness in the world?

What if we live as if holiness is the only thing that matters?

We are made to give God glory, and that glory is the shining forth of holiness. We are made to be holy. To understand what holiness is, we can turn to a quick reference in The Catechism of the Catholic Church:

All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity." All are called to holiness: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that . . . doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. 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 lives of so many saints.

(CCC 2013)

God wants this glory in our lives. And we want it, too. The restlessness we feel when we get caught up in the hurry and the noise is the manifestation of being out of step with the whole reason we are on earth. Sometimes, it's just little things, small decisions made over the course of the day. Other times, our life is seriously out of whack because we have set it upon a trajectory that is outside God's will. Either way, focusing on what is essential--being holy--will bring us to a place of peace.

In the passage from the First Book of Kings, Solomon seeks God's will for his life. All he asks is to be a man after God's own heart. He doesn't want power or riches or worldly "successes"; he wants the wisdom to discern as God does--to clearly hear the voice of God and to bring that to bear on all the decisions he makes.

Solomon recognizes the many voices of the world and how confusing their messages can be. He asks God to make His voice heard above the cacophony created by voices "so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted."

Think for a moment of our busy, noisy world. Consider all the voices, whether they be small humans in your household who call out to you without regard for the time of day or night, or the innumerable voices held inside the piece of technology that fits into the palm of your hand and influences how and with what thoughts you spend your time. Can you hear God above the noisy din?

So often, we prioritize and make lists and set goals and we lose our way in the clutter of those lists. Just set one goal this month. Make it your goal to live in pursuit of holiness. If we want to live in such a way that we are wholeheartedly devoted to the glory of God and the service of our neighbor, we need to fully access Christ's gift in order to have the strength we need. We need to use our time and our space in a way that they are ordered towards our essential purpose: to be holy. Everything else will fall into place if you winnow your priorities to one. Be holy.

To do this week over the course of a few quiet sessions with your Bible:

Read the Old Testament passage slowly and make notes in your Bible or journal. What does God want you to understand about the example that David was to his son Solomon? What message does the Holy Spirit have for you in the dream of Solomon?

Then, read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 slowly and carefully. (Over the course of this month, try to commit it to memory.) From this passage, craft a definition of holiness for yourself, taking care to see the relationship of love to holiness.

The heroic minute. It is the time fixed for getting up. Without hesitation: a supernatural reflection and ... up! The heroic minute: here you have a mortification that strengthens your will and does no harm to your body. If, with God's help, you conquer yourself, you will be well ahead for the rest of the day. It's so discouraging to find oneself beaten at the first skirmish.

St. Josemaria Escriva, The Way

Take Up & Read:

PSALM 1

ISAIAH 26:20-21; 27:5

MATTHEW 6:25-34

MARK 1:35

To Ponder:

Since the first Take Up & Read journal was published two years ago, the most commonly asked question I've received is, "How do I find time to create a habit of daily Bible study?"

And honestly, my knee jerk response is, "How do you not?"

Our Lord comes to us in the silence, and it's in the silence that we are best able to hear His clear, consoling voice. More than anything, God wants our hearts, freely given in a true and genuine relationship with Him. To build that relationship, we have to be available to Him, just as we are available to friends or spouses or children or parents or anyone else whose relationship we value.

It's easy to persuade ourselves that we are pursuing holiness in all the things we do--the tending, the caring, even the overt activities of ministry. But activity for God isn't the same as relationship with Him. It's not that serving is unimportant; it's that sitting at His feet is the most important (see Luke 10:38-42). It's foundational to holiness, which makes it foundational to the foundation.

We have a habit of Sunday Mass; we set aside that time every week to hear the Word of God and to worship Him. We communicate with Him both spiritually and physically, and we nurture a relationship there. That is good; it is so very good. Now, imagine if you were married and you only communicated once a week for an hour. That hour would be very good, but would it be enough? Your marriage would languish, no doubt about it.

In order to begin the day in the presence of God, we have to put ourselves in the presence of God. This intentional creation of quiet time with Jesus in the Word is going to look different in different homes. Ideally, we take St. Josemaria's advice and we set a fixed time to rise and we just do it every day until making our feet hit the floor right away becomes a habit as natural and unthinking as buckling our seatbelts as soon as we sit in a car. But what if you are awakened at unpredictable times to meet the needs of an infant? That's when intention takes over: that is your heroic moment, a moment given to you by God to sanctify. This is one of the few times I'm going to suggest a smartphone is your friend. Pull your baby close, open your Scripture app (and only your Scripture app) and like the baby you are feeding, let yourself be fed. Take those morning moments to "[r]id yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." (1 Peter 2:1-3)

Those morning moments of precious silence are holy and they set us on a course to live our day in the practiced presence of God. Whether you are a night person or a morning one doesn't matter. You are God's person, and He wants to capture your intention and speak into your day. It is a virtue to get up out of bed promptly and offer the day to our Lord. The best way to develop this virtue is to consistently practice it with the Lord's help.

Being alone and quiet is not enough. Be alone with the Word; otherwise, you're just hanging out with yourself. Christ will communicate to you through His Word. He'll become alive and real to your soul through his Spirit in that time. He will honor and glorify your effort to receive Him.

We want to be holy and we want to pray better. Scripture can help us do that. The stories God wants to tell us during our time in the Word can teach us all we need to know about sorrow and pain, joy and faithfulness, fear and trust. Every human emotion and need is addressed in God's Word. When we open our Bibles, we allow him to show us that he knows

and understands basic human feelings, and he can help us to live with them in holiness--to do better and to be better.

Finally, when we start the day in prayer with the Word open to our souls, we are reminded of God's covenant with us. We know that He promised our forefathers in faith, "I will be your God, and you will be my people." (Jeremiah 30:22) What Bible study tells us is that the Jews did innumerable things to break that covenant in innumerable ways and still, God made good on that promise. If we let him, God will remind us every day of our lives that the Bible is the story of His unbreakable promise to us. It's worth rising a little earlier for that Divine reminder, because with that knowledge there is truly power to take on the day.

To do:

Focus on establishing a habit of rising. If you are able, get out of bed at a set time every day and touch your Bible first (before your phone, before your chores--fix something hot to drink, if you must, but be quick about it and set about praying the Word.)

If your waking is finely tuned to a child, prepare ahead of time to incorporate scripture time first thing with your baby. A handheld issue of [Magnificat](#) magazine might work if you have adequate light. If you must, read scripture on your phone (biblegateway.com is free and the [Dwell app](#) has audio options) or play the Divine Office quietly while you nurse (search "[divine office audio](#)" for some options). Whatever you choose, be sure to set it where you can reach it or queue it up on your phone the night before so that it's accessible while tending the baby.

BE STILL AND KNOW GOD

“Never be in a hurry; do everything quietly and in a calm spirit.

Do not lose your inner peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset.

What is anything in life compared to peace of soul?”

— St. Francis de Sales

Take Up & Read over the course of this week, making notes in your bible or in a journal:

[Isaiah 26](#)

[Psalm 46:10](#)

[John 16:25-33](#)

[2 Peter 3:8-9](#)

Ponder this:

In the interest of full disclosure, this format of sharing Scripture with you comes at a great cost. In an effort to create scripture studies and to tell you about scripture studies, I hurried and hustled and worried and worked myself into a frenzy in the last year. I neglected my health and, to some degree, my household. I lived in a constant state of frantic production in order to make this ministry work. And in so doing, I learned a lot about what not to do. As a result, we re-structured Take Up & Read. But as big as that renovation is, it's nothing compared to the lessons I learned and the renovation to my soul.

Lesson number one: do not equate incessant busyness with efficiency and productivity. They are not necessarily even correlated. What God desires is not perpetual motion. He desires that we rest in Him and that we work from a place of peace and trust. God wants us to slow down. We have time.

Don't hurry. Hush the hustle. We seek change, and change will come as we develop new habits. Development takes time. Transformation happens slowly, one small step at a time. But don't give up—persevere. Keep at it. Be gentle and compassionate with yourself. So often, when we are even just a little out of step with God's will in our lives, it feels as if everything is awry. It's all too much and it's all caving in us and we think we have to work frantically to fix it. But maybe, what the situation demands instead is that we step out in trust and just rest in Him. Just do the next single thing He sets in front of us in that moment, with a peaceful, recollected heart. It's the peaceful heart that is the imperative.

In [Searching for and Maintaining Peace](#), Fr. Jacques Phillippe shares:

Often we become agitated and disturbed by trying to resolve everything by ourselves, when it would be more efficacious to remain peacefully before the gaze of God and to allow him to act and work in us with His wisdom and power, which are infinitely superior to ours.... This doesn't mean we should be lazy or inactive. Trusting God is courageously and powerfully active. This is an invitation to act, even to a tiresome level at times, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. This is not a spirit of disquietude, agitation, or excessive hurry, which is too often the case with us and the way we want to be active.

For me, this summer, it all came crashing down. May found me so sick I couldn't do the normal things of life. Interestingly, my normal way of "managing" stress is motion. I walk for miles—the more stressed, the more I walk. I clean my house—the more stressed, the cleaner it gets. But not this time. This time, I had to be still. And try as I might, I don't remember exactly how the habit began, but the Holy Spirit propelled me to an Adoration chapel. There, I was still before God. I had no set agenda. I had no script of prayers. I just sat there, totally spent, and waited to see what happened.

Floodgates of grace opened up. Literally, over the course of several weeks, so many obvious moments of "God was here" happened. Physical healing came very, very slowly. But spiritual healing astounded me. I did not hurry. I could not hurry. I was still. And God let me know him in the stillness. He invited me to stop trying so hard, and to trust him instead.

I want you to take two things from this. The first is that Adoration is a good thing. I cannot overstate the mystical power it has to bring peace to your life. Go to Adoration. Find a way. Take the baby if you need to. If there's no chapel near you, just sit in silence

before the tabernacle in your church. Switch off with a friend while the kids play at the church playground or run around on the grounds. Do whatever it takes to be still before the Lord. Let Him open the floodgates of holiness.

The second thing is to bring a spirit of stillness and adoration into your home so that you are able to access that peace. In his book, [The Power of Silence](#), Cardinal Robert Sarah writes, “Let us not hesitate to give pride of place to silent daily prayer in the solitude of our room...we can become true contemplatives by living in peace with God if our houses become temples of God.” Think of your home in a new way, and be sure there is a place for your soul to retreat and be still in the silence with God.

To do:

Take your time with the Scripture readings this week. Ideally, bring them with you to Adoration and just sit with God in quiet and stillness and hear what He tells you in the Word.

Think about Place + Purpose. Begin by creating a sanctuary for your soul in your home, somewhere that you will want to be. Know that this will be the place where you begin your day. What’s most important? Where do you draw strength? What (few) objects can you put there to support and encourage the practice of rising first to meet Jesus? See [The Little Oratory](#) for more thoughts on this idea.