

STRIVING FOR HOLINESS

Our destiny is unity with God, our Father, for all eternity. That is, we are all called to be saints. We are called to be holy. Jesus made this clear when he said, “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Of course, we will be spending our entire life struggling to achieve this goal. But we have to believe that it can be done. Jesus wouldn’t call us to do something that we can’t do.

What does our struggle for holiness have to do with our mandate to be apostles? St. Josemaría Escrivá said, “Your apostolate must be the overflow of your life ‘within.’”⁵ Quite simply, if we are not struggling to grow closer to God through a life of prayer and frequent access to the sacraments, we won’t have the spiritual wherewithal to be effective apostles. We can’t urge others to pursue a life of holiness if we are not struggling toward holiness ourselves. And we shouldn’t think that mere

5. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way* (Princeton: Scepter, 2001), no. 961.

activity, even reaching out to others with the message of the gospel, will win us our place in heaven. Jesus said,

Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers." (Mt 7:21–23)

So, what does this struggle for holiness look like in practical terms? Apostles have a plan of life that brings them closer to Our Lord despite their defects and failings. Apostles frequent the Holy Mass and the sacrament of confession; they spend time each day in mental prayer, praying the Rosary, and reading the New Testament and a spiritual book. Receiving regular spiritual guidance is also crucial. All the while they are striving to grow in the virtues and cast off their vices and defects.

The idea, of course, is to enkindle the fire of our love for God and our fellow man. With the love of God blazing within us, we'll be well disposed to bring others closer to the one who has changed our lives so fundamentally.

GROWTH IN OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FAITH

We can't love someone we don't know. So, it's important that we make our religious formation a priority. We need to study the Faith through regular spiritual reading and reading Scripture. Of course, taking advantage of other forms of religious instruction offered by our parish, nearby universities, or other organizations, as well as the various online venues can be very helpful in expanding our knowledge of the Faith. Nevertheless, just fifteen minutes or so a day of reading from the New Testament and a good spiritual book over time will enable us to acquire a good knowledge of the Faith. It's very important to get some good advice from a knowledgeable person on the best books to read. Good spiritual reading will not only improve our knowledge of the Faith; it will also provide us with material on which to reflect and bring to our prayer. An advisor can guide

our selection of books to enable us to acquire good doctrinal knowledge and ascetical formation.

I know this sounds like a lot—and it is a lot. But, if we use our time well and avoid wasting time on such things as television, surfing the internet, and social media, we can have a demanding spiritual plan of life as well as an active and fulfilling family, professional, and social life.