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Called to be holy: Cardinal Dolan's 10-step guide to holiness

An edited excerpt from then Archbishop Dolan's "Called to Be Holy" Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan
OSV Daily Take

10/29/2013



Here is the key to our spiritual growth: a faithful, personal, loving relationship with Jesus. To know Jesus, to hear Jesus, to love Jesus, to trust Jesus, to obey Jesus, to share his life in the deepest fiber of our being, and then to serve him — this is our goal.

How do we grow in holiness? How? That, of course, is our spiritual program, isn't it, the stewardship of the spirit, "the regimen of the soul bringing about the reign of God," to quote servant of the poor Charles de Foucauld. I propose to you a spiritual regimen, a stewardship of the spirit coming not from me, but from centuries of practice and learning.

1. Daily Prayer

Patient, persevering, persistent prayer, every day, is number one. Here I am not speaking of the Mass — such as the Eucharist — but of silent, personal, private prayer, a daily period of quiet communion with the Lord, conscious of his presence, accepting of his love, and returning it with praise, petition, and thanksgiving.

2. Daily Mass

From this daily Eucharistic meal will come, for all celebrate the Eucharist as the essential moment in their day, a reverential awe for the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and a desire to spend time before him there in visits and prayer.

3. Daily Fidelity to the Liturgy of the Hours

This ancient prayer of the Church is mostly associated with those in Holy Orders. It is also intended to be the prayer of the laity, who "are encouraged to recite the divine office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1175).

4. Daily Spiritual Reading

Lectio divina, daily reverent meditation upon Sacred Scripture, is first and foremost, of course, but I also speak of

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daily spiritual reading of the enduring books of our Catholic tradition, as well as interest in the burgeoning contemporary literature on the interior life. Nor should we forget attention to the documents of the magisterium, the words of our Holy Father, the documents of the Apostolic See, the messages and pastorals of our own bishops, all vehicles of the Holy Spirit for fostering our growth in sanctity.

5. Spiritual Direction

An honest, trusting, fruitful, consistent relationship with a spiritual director is, in some ways, the linchpin of all the rest, for this is where integration and interiorization begin to take place. The danger we all face is a life of formalism, where we passively do things just to get by, not allowing the values of formation to sink in and become part of us. Spiritual direction can promote this interiorization, this integration.

6. The Sacrament of Penance

Regular reliance upon the mercy of God abundant in the Sacrament of Penance should be a priority in our lives. While how often you approach this sacrament is a good topic to discuss with your spiritual director, at least once a month seems a solid tradition of the Church. That you approach confession regularly is a hallmark of sound spiritual stewardship. And, a practical help to make our regular confessions more fruitful would be a daily examination of conscience, praising God for our growth, asking for healing of the faults we admit.

7. Growing in Virtue

A tireless effort for growth in virtue and turning away from sin should be the pattern of our daily lives. Obedience to the constant refrain of the Gospels, we are always in the process of conversion, repentance, dying to sin, self, and Satan, rising to new life in Christ. This is the "paschal mystery." In practice, this means growth in virtue and struggle with sin. Development in particular virtues is most appropriate: faith, hope, charity, simplicity of life, chastity, obedience and integrity.

8. Devotion to the Blessed Mother and the Saints

Our devotion to them is a sustaining dependence upon the "Communion of Saints," an awareness that we are members of a supernatural family not confined to the here and now, that we have the saints as examples and helpers, pre-eminently, especially our Blessed Mother. Thus, a wholesome devotion to her would be an essential part of our spiritual regimen.

9. Holistic Formation, Allowing Spirituality to Permeate Our Lives

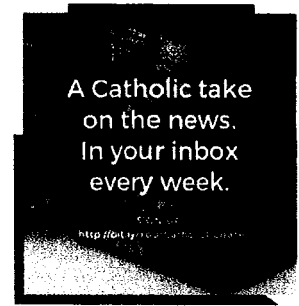
The spiritual life is not a tidy, isolated compartment of our existence! No, as the Pope John Paul II said, "Spiritual formation is the core which unifies and gives life to our entire being." Thus, every element of our lives is part of the spiritual arena, and growth in holiness will entail wholehearted immersion in a spiritual regimen.

10. The Final Component: Keeping Ever in View the Call to Holiness

Our goal is nothing less than a reordering of life through the sacraments, which will configure us in an irrevocable, radical way to Christ. That we may be good, holy, happy, healthy, learned, zealous selfless, committed faithful is the goal of our spiritual growth.

I have two notes of caution, however. First, growth in holiness is not our accomplishment, but a pure gift from God. The Lord does it, not me! These 10 steps of spiritual stewardship I just went through are not cozy little acts we perform to produce holiness — they are simply tried-and-true ways we open up in humility to let the Lord in to do his work in, on, for, and, often, in spite of us!

Second, to use the words of Sister Bridge McKenna, "The road inward to spiritual growth always results in a U-turn outward in love for others." Our stewardship of the Spirit is never a soothing benediction we cling to, but an inspiration to love humankind better. The Jesus who calls us to spiritual ecstasy on Mt. Tabor likewise invites us to the pouring out of self on Mt. Calvary.



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