

one

The Purpose of the Church is Holiness

When the Lord called the Israelites out of Egypt, it was to make them a holy people. The word “Holy” actually means set apart for God. It means something whose *purpose* is to give glory to God.

Well, when Christ established the Church, it was in order to make a community of holiness.

As St. Paul says, “Christ also loved the church, and delivered Himself up for it: that he might make Her holy, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life” ([Ephesians 5:25, 26](#)).

We exist to be holy, to live close to God, and to glorify God, by being close to and glorifying Christ. But where does this holiness come from? How does the Church receive Her power to make her members Holy?

two

Where does the Church’s Holiness come from?

The Church is Holy, ultimately, because all Three Persons of the Trinity are involved in her existence. The Church’s Soul is holy: the Holy Spirit. The Church’s Head and Husband is holy: Christ Jesus. The Church’s Creator is holy: God the Father. And therefore the Church’s Mission is Holy. The task entrusted to the Church is to make all her members Holy.

The Church exists to bring all humanity closer to God, to perfect and sanctify every human being.

“All the activities of the Church are directed, as toward their end, to the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God” *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10

“Therefore, in the Church, everyone, whether belonging to the hierarchy or being cared for by it, is called to holiness...” LG 39.

If we are members of the Church, the purpose of our lives is, at the end of the day, very, very simply put: become saints and bring others to God.

three

The Saints

We know for a fact that the Church is Holy and has the power to produce Holiness in Her members because She has already done so. The Church has made, and continues to make, saints.

This is why we canonize saints, to show the Person and Power of the Holy Spirit working through the Church

CCC #828: “By *canonizing* some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God’s grace, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as models and intercessors.”

The saints are the ones who show us *why* the Church exists, *what* the Church is capable of doing, and *how* it is that the Church, despite all the challenges inside and outside of her, remains a light of hope to the poor, broken human race.

four

The Church is steered by the Saints

When we say that the Church is holy, we mean that the Church is, at the end of the day, steered and guarded by the Holy Spirit, and by those men and women, the saints, who allow the Holy Spirit to work through them. Sometimes, when we think about the Church or the Church’s history, we focus on scandals, policy decisions, or even political and military conflicts. But that’s not the dynamic that leads the Church. That stuff doesn’t set the Church’s course.

As Cardinal Ratzinger said decades ago, “The fortuitous majorities that may form here or there in the Church do not decide their and our path: they, the saints, are the true, the normative majority by which we orient ourselves.”

When Saint Bernard of Clairvaux meditated on the verse of the Song of Songs where the Bride says, “I am black, but beautiful,” he interpreted that as a statement about how often it seems that the Church is black as the night sky. Often things seem dark, in the Church. There can be evil and confusion everywhere. But, says St. Bernard, there are always saints shining in that night sky like stars. And if you keep your eyes on the stars, like a sailor navigating a ship at night, you’ll never get lost.

five

Sacraments and Becoming Saints

How did the Church make her saints? By the power of the Holy Spirit, of course, but more specifically, by the Power of the Holy Spirit working through the Church’s sacraments.

The word “sacraments” comes from the same root as “sacred,” or Holy. These are the instruments by which the Church builds and cultivates the saints it is her mission to produce.

As Fulton Sheen said, the Church is like a prism, which channels pure light into the seven colors of the spectrum. So too is the Church the prism that channels the pure holiness of God into the seven sacraments. And that means you have at your disposal the same resources that the saints had at theirs.

It was Baptism that made St. Francis. It was the Eucharist that made St. Therese. It was Confirmation that made the Apostles. It was going to Confession every week of his life that made John Paul II. It was the grace of Matrimony that made St. Thomas More a martyr for marriage.

So receive the sacraments. Frequent the sacraments. And ask God to use the sacraments to make you one of the saints that transforms the Church and saves the world.