

PERSONAL SANCTIFICATION

If anyone ever asks us what our goal is as Christians, a good answer would be, “To be like Jesus Christ.” This is because we believe Jesus is the model for our lives. As the Second Vatican Council made clear, Jesus Christ is not only *true* man, He is also the *perfect* man, because He was morally perfect, which is another way of saying He was completely holy. “He Who is ‘*the image of the invisible God*’ (Col 1:15), is Himself the perfect man. ... [And] whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22 and 41). Because Christ displayed for the world humanity in its unfallen perfection, He is the model and measure of our own growth in holiness and personal sanctification.

We all know that none of us can ever be perfect in this life. But it remains true that Christ challenged us to pursue and strive for perfection, when He said, “*Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect*” (Mt 5:48). Christ knew that we cannot achieve moral perfection in this life. He “*did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well*” (Jn 2:25). But Christ still called us to be holy, and we answer this call by trying to imitate the example of holiness and heroic virtue that Christ displayed for the world. St. Paul summarized this great call to holiness when he wrote, “*Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 2:5).

Hopefully, each of us already desires to be holy, even if we are aware of how challenging holiness can be. Our effort to live like Christ begins with our contemplation of how He lived, and we do that by reflecting carefully on the portrait of Christ that is painted for us in the Gospels. As one spiritual author puts it, “The first step in the spiritual ways is to aim at developing and cultivating a strong personal admiration of Jesus of Nazareth [A]dmiration begets love, and love inspires imitation. He who admires the man Jesus will feel compelled to imitate Him in His life, His principles and His actions” (Edward Leen, *In the Likeness of Christ*).

We don’t need to be intimidated by the moral perfection of Christ; rather, we should be inspired by Him to avoid settling for mediocrity in our lives as Christians. Pope St. John Paul II warned about having a minimalist attitude about the Christian life. He wrote, “[S]ince Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. ... [T]his ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few ‘uncommon heroes’ of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual. ... The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this *high standard of ordinary Christian living*: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction” (*Novo Millennio Inuente*, 31).

The individual pursuit of sanctity can change the world. And, anyone who wants to help make the world a better place should begin with an honest effort and desire to let God sanctify his or her own life, because Christ told us to remove the wooden beam from our own eye before we try to remove the splinter from our brother’s eye (cf. Mt 7:5).