

HOLINESS

By Fr. John Catoir

Former Director, the Christophers

Holiness is not something
that comes from doing good;
we do good because we are holy.

Holiness is not something
we acquire by avoiding evil;
we avoid evil because we are holy.

Holiness is not something
that follows from prayer;
we pray because we are holy.

Holiness is not the result of kindness;
we are kind because we are holy.

Holiness is not something
that blossoms when
we are courageous;
we are courageous
because we are holy.

Holiness is not the result
of character building;
we build character
because we are holy.

Holiness is not a gift we obtain
after a lifetime of service;
we give service
because we are holy.

Our holiness is God with us,
Emmanuel.

And while it is true that holiness
carries with it both the
Cross and Resurrection,
it is more a GIFT than a reward.

What does **Santa** really want us to teach the Children during **Christmas**?

Teach them the old meaning of Christmas. The meaning that a now-a-day Christmas has forgotten!

A fir tree: Teach them that the pure green color of the stately fir tree remains green all year round, depicting the everlasting hope of mankind. All the needles point heavenward, making it a symbol of man's thoughts turning toward heaven.

A star: Teach them that the brilliant star was the heavenly sign of promised long ago. God promised a Savior for the world and the star was the sign of fulfillment of that promise.

A candle: Teach them that the candle symbolizes that Christ is the light of the world, and when we see this great light we are reminded of He who displaces the darkness. We too, as baptized Catholics are called to be the light of the world, our light must shine before others so that everyone may see our good deeds and glorify our heavenly Father.

A wreath: Teach them that the wreath symbolizes the eternal nature of love. Real love never ceases. Love is one continuous round of affection.

A holly leaf: Teach them that the holly plant represents immortality. It represents the crown of thorns worn by our Savior. The red holly berries represent blood shed by Him.

A candy cane: Teach them that the candy cane represents the Good Shepherd's crook which helps bring back strayed sheep from the flock. The candy cane is the symbol that we are our brother's keeper. White to symbolize the virgin birth and sinless nature of Jesus, hard candy to symbolize the solid rock, the foundation of the Church, and firmness of the promises of God, red stripes, 3 of them to show the scourging that Jesus received, by which we are healed, the large one was for the blood shed by Christ on the cross so that we could be forgiven and have the promise of eternal life, the flavor of mint is similar to hyssop, which was associated with purification and sacrifice in the Old Testament times.



Look at the Candy Cane,
What do you see?
Stripes are red
Like the blood shed for me
White is for my Savior
Who's sinless and pure!
"J" is for Jesus,
My Lord, that's for sure!
Turn it around
And a staff you will see
Jesus my shepherd
Was born for me.

A bell: Teach them that as the lost sheep are found by the sound of a bell, it should ring people to the fold. The bell symbolizes guidance and return.

An angel: Teach them that it was the angels that heralded in the glorious news of the Savior's birth. The angels sang, Glory to God in the highest, on earth, peace and good will.

A gift: Teach them that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. And that the wisemen bowed before the holy baby Jesus and presented Him with gold, frankincense and myrrh. We should give gifts in the same spirit as the wise men.

An ornament of Santa Claus: Teach them that Santa Claus symbolizes the generosity and good will we feel during the month of December. Remember, the true meaning of Christmas: do not put me in the center, for I am but a humble servant of the One who is, and I bow down and worship Him, our Lord, our God.

As we finish 2013, where did the year go?

Please find enclosed your 2014 Magnet Calendar and your toothpaste pusher . . . so you can remember first thing every morning to “PICK, PACK & PRAY!” PICK what you need to do: have a useless or useful attitude? PACK it with you all that good vibes knowing that you are clothed with Christ (*Galatians 3:27*). Then PRAY for anything and if you have faith, you will receive it (*Matthew 21:22*). But remember, God has only 3 possible answers to our prayers: YES, NOT NOW and NO, I have something better.

Herewith I share with you the highlights of some of the pilgrimages I escorted throughout this year.

As I needed a Chaplain for our May departure to Fatima, Avila and Lourdes pilgrimage, I started calling all the priests in the book! What



book? Lo and behold, I stumbled on the name of The Very Reverend Father Vic dela Cruz, J.V., and asked him if he was available to be a Chaplain for a small group. When heaven looks down and wants you to really go on a pilgrimage, they clear your busy schedule, and SUPER BUSY he was, but somehow for that 10 day period, miraculously it just so happened that it was free, so he couldn't believe that he was calling me back to say YES. The most intellectual person I have ever met, but yet very down to earth . . . when he finally laughs. We would have our group sessions at night reflecting on what happened during the day considering that we were in Fatima for the 96th Anniversary of the 1st Apparition of Our Lady of Fatima to the three children.

The most busiest days in Fatima are May 13 and October 13 (Apparition of the Miracle of the Sun). To be able to be a part of this celebration is something that you need to do once in your life. People from all parts of the world come to one place to pray in unison. And as we reminisced, Fr. Vic's childhood stories to priesthood were shared by his cousin. His smile and everyone's laughter will never be forgotten. Along with the phrase “Solo Dios basta”.

4 days after I arrived from Europe, I was headed for Mexico to meet up with a group from San Francisco. Our Lady of Guadalupe was very instrumental with this pilgrimage from the beginning. Aeromexico had schedule changes that were so unbelievable, unhuman and ongoing. I say unhuman because it seemed as though whoever was scheduling the flights probably thought that they were herding cattle on their planes! Probably a passenger's nightmare if the Blessed Mother did not intercede. But a miracle She performed that only my Mexico counterpart and I witnessed whereby the group did not even notice any flight schedule inconvenience. (*This is why I love my job so much! I get to see heaven working out the details.*) 3 weeks prior to a groups departure, I always conduct an Orientation Meeting provided that the group is from the same area. I will fly anywhere across the U.S. just to meet the pilgrims in person, that's actually the highlight of my ministry. So in San Francisco, almost everyone attended. I asked everyone to share why they joined this pilgrimage to Mexico. And the answers ranged from: it's a thank you trip, I've always wanted to visit Our Lady of Guadalupe, it's a dream come true to be able to go on a pilgrimage, and so on. At this event, that's also when I give out the documents, the bags and answer any questions they may have along with giving them some tips on how to pack, what type of luggage to buy, etc., so what happened with the priest? Without mentioning any names, when I asked on my “just for fun” priest questionnaire for the Pilgrim Diary that we give out, on the question “dislikes”, he answered “Mexican food”! Well, at the last minute, it was totally NO Mexican food for him to experience . . . he wasn't able to go. This is the first pilgrimage I've gone on without a Chaplain. But with the spirituality and leadership of Sr. Nona along with the guidance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the impeccable participation of the pilgrims, and the coordination of Raul, our wonderful guide, everything worked out well, including the Masses.



June came along and I was back to Fatima, Spain, and Lourdes. In Spain, the Franciscan, Fr. Julian and his group chose to travel to Santiago de Compostela (where the body of St. James lies in repose) and Loyola (birthplace of St. Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits). In between these two towns, as a surprise, I booked them in a very quaint hotel in the wine region of Spain (Haro), which at first Fr. Julian jokingly told them we were staying at “The Convent of the Monghas sin Bodas”, (because in Fatima, we stayed at the prior SVD Seminary . . . to better appreciate the humble beginnings of priests). To everyone's surprise, the staff were not old nuns, nor the rooms or the food served simple as what you would expect, rather extravagantly decorated including a live band where

some of the pilgrims danced the night away, also because it was the birthday of one of our pilgrims. What a way to celebrate! Another divine intervention that occurred with this group was the incident that upon leaving Lourdes for the airport for their flight back to the US, the water from the River Gave (of Massabielle) started rising thereby flooding the center of Lourdes. (Pictures of the devastation are currently posted in the fences near the shrine and on the internet. Most of the hotels were damaged and had to be closed down for renovations even until now.) If our scheduled pilgrimage had been one day less from our intended date, the whole group would have been stuck in Lourdes for another week or two.



Pictures & Words are powerful, but reality is better:



August rolled and I went with Fr. Herman's Group to Russia. Ever wonder why their churches have onion-domed tops? Call me, and I'll tell you the answer. Stayed with them for 5 days and went home. But the group continued to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. I joined them again one week later when they arrived in Prague. I forced Fr. Herman and Anita to try the "fish" feet massage while onlookers try to figure out if they are really having fun. We then continued to Cologne, where the body of the 3 wise men are believed to be kept at the Cathedral. The following morning, we left for Holland to visit the community and tomb of St. Arnold Janssen, the founder of the Congregation of the SVDs in Steyl, the order which Fr. Herman belongs to and where my 80 something year old Aunt is also a part of as she is a Blue Nun, what they call the members of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit. She's still alive and kicking and has the initials SSps after her name. If you want to know what that means too, you'll have to call me. Anytime we have an SVD Chaplain, I always encourage them to include Steyl as part of their pilgrimage, as it is truly a beautiful start or relaxing ending for a pilgrimage, as this place is truly peaceful. As the group left for the United States, I flew to Naples to join another group.



I had booked my "repeaters" from Honolulu on a Princess Mediterranean Cruise. And since I couldn't be with them on the whole trip, I promised them that I would meet them in Italy. We visited Positano, Sorrento, and Naples. Then I took them to an unbelievable shrine where the saint's blood (she died in 665 AD !!!) kept in a monstrance liquifies in front of your eyes . . . only if you are holy! Filipino nuns are the custodians of this church. They got back on the ship and I took the train to Rome. I had prepared for this, so all I had was a carry-on. And yes, everything did fit! It's all in the packing. The following day, I met them at the Civitavecchia port then we headed for Rome to do a full day tour of the Vatican, the Sistine Chapel and a panoramic tour. They got back on the ship and once again I took the train to Livorno. The following day, I met them at the port and we headed for the UNESCO site of Cinque Terre, continuing on to the leaning tower of Pisa. Once again they headed back to their ship and I took the train to Florence where I caught my flight the next day back to the US. By this time, it was now September.



One week after, I flew to Prague to meet up with Fr. Barry's Group. He is well known for his healing masses. We travelled through Poland, visiting the Black Madonna in Czestochowa, Wadowice (birthplace of Pope John Paul II), Auschwitz (Concentration Camp seen in the movie Schindler's List), the Salt Mine and to Lagiewniki, the shrine of the Divine Mercy. We then continued to Lithuania for a city tour which included the church where the original Divine Mercy picture is hanging. We also visited Siauliai where you can find the Hill of Crosses and where you too can leave your own.



As the group left for the States, I flew to Paris to meet my friend, Nancy and I drove to Mont St. Michel, which is where the picture on the Christmas card is taken. We first tried to experience what's it like to sleep at a Chateau. Very french, and very creepy! Then the following night, we had planned to stay inside the walls of Mont St. Michel. All properties (hotels, houses, restaurants, stores, etc.) inside the village are never sold but are passed down from generation to generation. We arrived there at 4PM, just in time for our walking tour which consisted of taking off your shoes and walking in the silt. At first, it hurt our feet but then as you get used to it and start walking in the so-called slippery mud, it was kinda fun, and felt child-like (*Matthew 18:3*)! Jump heavily on the silt and it becomes quick sand. Halfway around, it started drizzling, so it took us an hour to go around the fortress, and then the tide started coming in, and the water was just a sight to see. Another 15 minutes passed, and Mont St. Michel became an island! Where we once walked was all covered with water. Our feet felt like we had just finished a foot spa. All that walking exercise and with each step . . . rich minerals. The following day, I forced Nancy to walk up maybe



about 365 steps. Good exercise! She thought she couldn't do it but she did it with flying colors, just in time for Mass at the top of the abbey. Then we stopped to visit the 4 museums that explains to you how Mont St. Michel was built, and the life in the villages back in the medieval ages (including the chastity belt!). We left around 5PM and headed towards the Normandy Beaches also referred to as the D-DAY landing beaches. The allied invasions (Americans, British & Canadians) to defeat Germany happened on June 6, 1944 during World War II. Truly an amazing sight and so much history! Then the following day, we flew to London (for my business meeting) and stayed there for 2 nights. As a treat, my London associates treated us to the amazing live show "Beatles". It really sounded like them!

4 days later, I left again for Fatima, Spain, Lourdes, Nevers (to view the incorrupt body of St. Bernadette, primary visionary of Lourdes) & Paris with the wonderful group from Naples and Fort Myers in Florida led by the very joyful Fr. Ronnie as their Chaplain. This is one group that I did not have a chance to conduct an Orientation Meeting with but it was truly a delight to have travelled with them. Truly the East Coast folks are very different than the West Coast folks. I learned so much from them.



3 days after my arrival, I left with Fr. Alvin's Group to Israel and Italy. To be continued . . .