

Easter A 5 May 2 & 3, 2026 Greenwich (and children's homily at end just for the 9:45 mass)

“Holy, holy, holy Lord.” You say that, or sing that, at every mass you attend. It's a quote from the sixth chapter of Isaiah, as the angels praise God in his temple.

And at every mass, indeed every time you make the sign of the cross, you call upon the Holy Spirit.

And at every mass you hear the priest ask the Holy God to make the gifts of bread and wine holy.

And every mass invokes the intercession of the holy ones—that what the word “saint” means---the holy ones who have gone before us in faith.

So, God is holy, the Spirit is holy, the saints are holy, the Eucharistic gifts are holy.

But that second reading makes a much more surprising, more expansive claim: you are holy; you are a holy priesthood; you are a holy nation.

Wait a minute, you might say. That might be true of those other folks, the pious ones, the prayerful ones, but not me.

For just a minute, I'd like to challenge that.

My homily last week stressed that the Good Shepherd speaks to each of us by name. He calls us into covenant because the Father always offers us a share in the very life of the Holy Trinity, so that we might have life, abundant and overflowing.

A few years ago, a high school classmate told me he doesn't feel all that alive, that he's missing out on something, his life even a bit of a waste. A pastor had told him that “all God asks is that you try to live a good life, and when you fail, as you always will, to start trying all over again.”

My friend interpreted this to mean that even the best among us are not “holy people” but rather unholy people who try after every setback to be something that comes close to being “holy”—meaning “a good caring person” in the eyes of God, our families, our friends and our enemies.

I think that expresses the real problem, but it’s not what he thinks it is.

Holiness does not mean moral perfection. That’s the subtle but real misapprehension so many Christians live under.

The big theological term for it is “works righteousness” but that’s just inflated language for thinking that God’s gift isn’t really a free gift, but a disguised demand.

It’s thinking that God’s unconditional love, incarnated in the person and work, the dying and rising of Jesus, really carries all kinds of conditions. And you only are saved if you read the footnotes and small print.

That’s not our God!

That may be a projection of our own needs and super-egos, but it’s not the Father revealed by Jesus.

The good news, proclaimed and enfleshed in Jesus, is that God really does love sinners---that’s each of us---completely and unconditionally. And when we are lost and can’t find our way back on our own, the Father sends the Son, to seek out and save us. He makes the atoning sacrifice for us, when we are unable to do so ourselves.

Thomas Merton claimed, “We become saints not by violently overcoming our own weakness, but by letting the Lord give us the strength and purity of God’s Spirit in exchange for our weakness and misery.”

Let me quote to you again some of that second reading, from the First Letter of Peter, but from a different translation, one a bit less “churchy” and formal. It comes from The Message, by theologian and poet Eugene Peterson.

Listen to the good news:

“Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven---and the future starts now.

God is keeping careful watch over us and the future.

The Day is coming when you will have it all---life healed and whole.

When Jesus wraps this all up, it is your faith, not your gold, that God will have on display as evidence of his victory.

So, roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear, be totally ready to receive the gift that's coming when Jesus arrives.

Let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness, for God's said, ‘I am holy; you be holy.’

It cost God plenty to get you out of the dead-end, empty-headed life you grew up in.

He paid with Christ’s sacred blood, you know.

He died like an unblemished, sacrificial lamb.

And this was no afterthought. Even though it has only lately--at the end of ages-- become public knowledge, God always knew he was going to do this for you.

It's because of the sacrifice of Messiah, whom God then raised from the dead and glorified, that you trust God, that you know you have a future in God.

Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you will serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God.

You are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you--- from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.”

That’s really the hard work: accepting having been accepted by God.

God’s dream, God’ one passionate desire, is to give us Himself, to draw us into the very heart of the Trinity, to share God’s own intimate life with us. That makes many of us profoundly uncomfortable, because “there is only one response we can give if we accept God’s gift of himself, which is to give ourselves in return...”

Some of you may remember the British nun, Sister Wendy Beckett, a hermit who some years ago had a PBS television series on great art. An interviewer once asked about her life of solitude and prayer, and Sister Wendy responded, “I let God love me.” As Cecilia McGowan notes, “Sister Wendy was not claiming anything out of the ordinary. God’s greatest desire is that each of us do the same thing—let him love us.” (Cecilia McGowan, “The Gift of Grace”, Desert Call, Winter 2009, p 10)

And that's how God fashions us into a holy people, a holy priesthood. God's own holiness begins to enfold us, transfuse us, flow through us.

We are made holy, not by the righteousness of our deeds, but by God's choice of us, God's covenant with us, made in the blood of the Sacrificed Lamb. We are sanctified for a mission on behalf of God.

And that priestly mission is sacramental: that is, it underscores the holiness of all creation, and of all genuinely human moments, and of each and every one of God's children.

The mission is to bless with the gifts of reconciliation, thanksgiving, humility and self-sacrificing love, so that each person in turn can accept the divine gift of having been accepted.

A contemporary Christian musician puts it this way

Holiness, holiness is what I long for;

holiness is what I need;

holiness, holiness is what you want for me.

Righteousness, righteousness is what I long for;

righteousness is what I need;

righteousness, righteousness is what you want for me.

So take my heart and form it,

take my mind, transform it,

take my will, conform it,

to yours, to yours, to yours, O Lord.

Priesthood, your holy priesthood, has no power to compel, to bind or loose. Its power is that it welcomes everyone who truly seeks to encounter the presence of the Holy.

Your holy priesthood seeks and hopes for the good of all, in whatever setting we are called to minister.

It is a priesthood of mutual ministry of support and encouragement, of glimpsing and pointing to the Holy that lifts us up and carries us on into the future.

It is priesthood that affirms, enhances and clarifies what Genesis says of all God's creation: God looked upon everything he had made, and it was very good.

Our world, our nation, our society needs us to be such holy people, such a holy priesthood.

You remember the Surgeon General's report said that a vast number of Americans find themselves sick, angry and alone. It described an epidemic of loneliness and isolation, where people feel isolated, invisible and insignificant. And it has continued to worsen. This is a cultural problem, a culture in need of connections, a rekindled faith in community.

That is part of the priestly work of the priestly people of God. It's a ministry of standing outside of ourselves, stretching out toward God and letting God stretch us ever more toward the Divine. It's risky, because we won't be in control. But it will empower us to receive more and more of God's gifts, precisely as gifts, and say thanks, and delight in the divine presence just as God ever delights in us.

We come here again and again to receive those gifts, the gifts of the holy Eucharist, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the holiness of Holy God, the gifts of the ministries of God's holy people.

Here we learn how to pay attention, how to cultivate patience and courage, how to stand faithfully at the margins, in the eddies at the edge of the stream alongside those battered against the rocks. That's where, in our weakness more than in our strengths, we learn especially to look beneath the surface and glimpse the presence of the faithful, holy God.

Holiness, holiness is what I long for;
holiness is what I need;
holiness, holiness is what you want for me.
So take my heart and form it,
take my mind, transform it,
take my will, conform it,
to yours, to yours, to yours, O Lord.

And the people of God said, Amen.

Easter A. 5. Children's liturgy. May 3rd, 2026.

We had that wonderful rite of admission for our two catechumens at the start of mass, but it took a little bit of time, so I have a short homily this morning.

This is my whole puncher from my office. And these pages of paper is my homily. Let me show you how these two things go together.

I'll hold this paper over my wastebasket so I won't have bits of paper all over the floor. That would be messy, and the people who cleaned the church wouldn't like that very much.

What am I doing? I'm punching holes. I'm being holey! You can see through the holes I made in the paper.

And then I can put the rings in my binder through the holes and then the papers will stay in my binder.

Now there is another word we hear around church a lot, and it sounds just like that. Holy.

The words are spelt differently.

When I punched the paper, the word is holey, like a hole.

HOLEY

But the word we use in church is holy, spelled HOLY.

We say that word every time we make the sign of the Cross, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And we sing it when we start the special prayer at mass, Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty

And we even heard it in the second reading today, from the First Letter of St. Peter. St. Peter wrote, “You are a chosen race, a holy nation, a people who belong to God.”

When we say, three times, that God is holy, we are saying is that God is so great, so marvelous, so wonderful, so powerful, so all knowing, so, well, everything good,

That’s why we repeat it three times.

We're saying that God is the highest and best of everything there is. God is all powerful and uses that power only to do good.

And that scripture says that we are holy too.

What does that mean? Does that mean we are like God?

Not exactly. We are not all powerful. And we don’t always use our power to do good.

When the bible says we are holy, it means we are being “set apart for the service of God.”

And that doesn’t just mean priests or nuns or bishops.

Every disciple of Jesus is set apart to serve the Lord.

See, God desires that each of us become so loving, so caring, so helpful to others, that the world will know that we are God’s beloved children.

When we do that, the holy God is in our thoughts and in our hearts, and we begin to act like God wants us to act. That's when we become holy.

That doesn't mean that we're exactly like God, but it does mean that the holy God is working in and through us.

Being holy means we know what is right and what is wrong and we choose the right instead of the wrong.

Being holy means we choose to open ourselves more to God, by praying, by learning the stories of the bible, and by coming to church each Sunday.

The closer we get to God, or the closer we let God to get to us, the more others will see the happiness in our lives and in our faces.

Then our joy will say it for us. We are becoming holy.

To become holy means we become even more loving, starting with our family members, and our friends, and our classmates, and the people in our parish family. It starts in those places with those people, but grows bigger and bigger as you grow bigger.

Jesus said, "Let your light shine so that others may see your good works and give glory to God."

God has chosen you and set you apart for His service. So we pray, today and every day, Dear God, help us be holy. Amen.