The HOLY SEE

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LEO XIV

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 8 April 2026
[**Multimedia**]

The Documents of the Second Vatican Council. II. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*. 7. *Holiness and evangelical counsels in the Church*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

The Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Lumen gentium* (*LG*) on the Church dedicates an entire chapter, the fifth, to the universal vocation to holiness of all the faithful every one of us is called to live in the grace of God, practising the virtues and imitating Christ. Holiness, according to the Conciliar Constitution, is not a privilege for the few, but a gift that requires every baptized person to strive for the perfection of charity, that is, the fullness of love towards God and towards one's neighbour. Charity is, in fact, the heart of the holiness to which all believers are called: infused by the Father, through the Son Jesus this virtue "rules over all the means of attaining holiness and gives life to these same means" (*LG*, 42). The highest level of holiness, as in the early days of the Church, is martyrdom, the "supreme witness of faith and charity" (*LG*, 50: for this reason, the Council text teaches that every believer must be ready to confess Christ even unto blood (cf. *LG*, 42), as has always been the case and continues to be so today. This readiness to bear witness is realized every time Christians leave signs of faith and love in society, committing themselves to justice.

All the Sacraments, and in a pre-eminent way the Eucharist, are nourishment that fosters a holy life, assimilating every person to Christ, the model and measure of holiness. He sanctifies the Church, of which He is the Head and Shepherd: holiness is, from this point of view, His gift, which is manifested in our daily life every time we receive it with joy and respond to it with commitment. In this regard, Saint Paul VI, in the General Audience of 20 October 1965, recalled that the Church, to be authentic, requires that all the baptized must "be holy, that is, truly worthy, strong and faithful children of hers". This is realized as an inner transformation, whereby the life of every person is conformed to Christ by virtue of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom* 8:29; *LG*, 40).

Lumen gentium describes the holiness of the Catholic Church as one of her constitutive characteristics, to receive in faith, inasmuch as she is believed to be "indefectibly holy" (*LG*, 39): this does not mean that she is so in a full and perfect sense, but that she is called to confirm this divine gift during her pilgrimage towards the eternal destination, walking "amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God" (Saint Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 51,2; *LG*, 8). The sad reality of sin in the Church, that is, in all of us, invites each person to carry out a serious change of life, entrusting ourselves to the Lord, who renews us in charity. It is precisely this infinite grace, which sanctifies the Church, that entrusts us with a mission to fulfil day after day: that of our conversion. Therefore, holiness does not only have a practical nature, as if it were reducible to an ethical commitment, however great, but concerns the very essence of Christian life, both personal and communal.

From this perspective, a decisive role is played by consecrated life, which the Conciliar Constitution considers in the sixth chapter (cf. nos. 43-47). In the holy People of God, it constitutes a prophetic sign of the new world, experienced here and now in history. Indeed, signs of the Kingdom of God, already present in the mystery of the Church, are those evangelical counsels that shape every experience of consecrated life: poverty, chastity and obedience. These three virtues are not rules that shackle freedom, but liberating gifts of the Holy Spirit, through which some of the faithful are wholly consecrated to God. Poverty expresses complete trust in Providence, freeing one from calculation and self-interest; obedience takes as its model the self-giving that Christ offered to the Father, freeing one from suspicion and domination; chastity is the gift of a heart that is whole and pure in love, at the service of God and the Church.

By conforming to this style of life, consecrated persons bear witness to the universal vocation of holiness of the entire Church, in the form of radical discipleship. The evangelical counsels manifest full participation in the life of Christ, unto the Cross: it is precisely by the sacrifice of the Crucified One that we are all redeemed and sanctified! By contemplating this event, we know that there is no human experience that God does not redeem: even suffering, lived in union with the passion of the Lord, becomes a path of holiness. The grace that converts and transforms life thus strengthens us in every trial, pointing us not towards a distant ideal, but towards the encounter with God, who became man out of love. May the Virgin Mary, the all-holy Mother of the Incarnate Word, always sustain and protect our journey.

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APPEAL

Following these past few hours of great tension in the Middle East and throughout the world, I welcome with satisfaction, and as a sign of deep hope, the announcement of an immediate two-week ceasefire. Only by returning to the negotiating table can we bring the war to an end.
I urge you to accompany this time of delicate diplomatic work with prayer, in the hope that a willingness to engage in dialogue may become the means to resolve other situations of conflict in the world.
I reiterate my invitation to everyone to join me in the Prayer Vigil for Peace, which we will celebrate here in Saint Peter's Basilica on Saturday 11 April.

Special greetings:

I greet the English speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, in particular the groups from England, Ireland, Nigeria, Australia, the Philippines, Vietnam and the United States of America. In the joy of the risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all and may his peace be with you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear brothers and sisters, in today's catechesis on the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, we turn our attention to the universal call to holiness. Every baptized person is called to be holy: to live in God's grace, to practice virtue and to become like Christ. At its heart is love for both God and neighbor, and its greatest expression is martyrdom, the supreme witness of faith and charity. For this reason, the Church teaches that believers should be ready to confess Christ to the point of shedding blood. However, the interior transformation that conforms us to Christ is not possible without the aid of the Sacraments, most especially the Eucharist. In this regard, I would like to make particular mention of those men and women who consecrate their lives to God through the evangelical counsels: poverty, chastity and obedience which express their complete trust in God's providence, modelled on Christ's gift of himself to the Father with a pure heart. By their lives, consecrated persons radically witness to the fullness of life in Christ, even to the cross.

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