

## FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (2025 - C)

Today I want to talk about a word we use in church all of the time, but even though we use it all the time, I don't think many of us really understand what it means, and in fact, if I had to guess, I would say that many of us would have a hard time coming up with a good definition.

Yet we need to understand the concept or idea behind this word. We need to understand what we mean by it, or we won't be able to have a good understanding of God.

So what is this word? This word is "Holy." Now just think for a moment about how often we use this word.

We have the song, "Holy God we praise Thy name." There is the Holy Trinity. There is the Holy Spirit. We speak of the Holy Name of Jesus. Just after Christmas, we have the Feast of the Holy Innocents and the Feast of the Holy Family. In the prayer, the "Hail Mary," we say "Holy Mary, Mother of God." We call the pope in Rome our Holy Father, and we call his government in the Vatican, the Holy See.

We read from the Holy Bible. In addition, at each Mass, we always have a reading from the Holy Gospel. We have Holy Communion. We speak of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Then we have the Sacrament of Holy Orders in which men are ordained deacons, priests, and bishops. The Third Commandment is this: Remember keep holy the Lord's day. Besides that, there are Holy Days of Obligation and there is also Holy Week, and in that week, we have Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday.

Each year we celebrate the feast of the Holy Cross. We have Holy Water, and we have Holy Oils the chief among them being Holy Chrism. When God spoke to Moses, He said come no further, because the place where you stand is holy ground. In the Temple in Jerusalem, there was the holy of holies, a place where the ark of the covenant was kept.

Then, if you want to add to this list, remember that the Latin word for holy is "sanctus." From that word we get the English word saint. So instead of Saint Joseph or Saint Paul or Saint Barbara or Saint Ann, we could just as well say, Holy Joseph or Holy Paul or Holy Barbara or Holy Ann. Then we have the Sanctuary here in church, named as such because it is the holiest place in the Church; it's where Mass is celebrated.

So, as you can see, we use the word "holy" a great deal. It's a word used to refer to things that pertain to our Holy Catholic Faith and to the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic church to which we all belong. So what does the word mean? What does the word "holy" signify?

Well, to understand holiness, we must begin with God who is holy.

In our first reading from the Prophet Isaiah, we heard of how Isaiah was granted a vision of God, and what He saw terrified him. In his vision, God was seated upon a high and lofty throne. Seraphim, the highest of the angels, were standing above the Lord. Each had six wings. With two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet and with two they flew.

As they flew, they cried out one to another, **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts! All the earth is full of His glory!”** As these great and powerful angels spoke, we are told that the very threshold, the very foundation of the temple, shook and the building was filled with smoke. At that, Isaiah said, **“Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”**

Isaiah was afraid because he was painfully aware that he was in the wrong place, that he didn't belong where he was. Isaiah was a good man and God's servant, but nevertheless, compared to God who was infinitely holy and perfect, Isaiah knew his imperfections and sins made him absolutely unworthy to be where he was. He didn't deserve to see God and live. Just think about that for a moment ... Isaiah who was a saint felt so unworthy to be in the presence of God that he believed himself lost.

It's interesting that Saint Peter had a similar reaction. In our holy gospel today, Jesus worked a miracle and filled the Apostles' nets with fish. Saint Peter was so filled with awe that he fell to his knees and said, **“Depart from me Lord for I am a sinful man.”**

Saint Peter recognized that He was profoundly unworthy to stand in the presence of the Lord, and so he fell to his knees, but even more than that, not only would he not stand up in the presence of the Lord, but he even asked the Lord to leave him.

So what's going on here? How are we to understand the reactions of Isaiah and of Saint Peter and of the Seraphim? Why did they behave as they did in the presence of God? Most people today find these reactions strange. Why would someone have a holy fear in God's presence? Why bow down? Why prostrate oneself before God? After all, God loves us right? In fact, many would add that He loves us unconditionally, and by that they mean that God accepts how we choose to live no matter what. So, why be afraid? Why did Isaiah and Saint Peter behave as they did?

There are two reasons: First, they were humble men; in other words, they did not pretend to be something that they were not. Second, God is holy. Let's look at the second reason first, namely, that God is holy.

To get an idea of holiness, you need to think about something that's very special to you, something that you hold very dear. Maybe you have a piece of jewelry your grandmother gave to you. Maybe you have some tool or a fishing rod your dad used. When I think something like this, I think of Christmas ornaments my grandparents use to hang on their Christmas trees nearly 100 years ago and which my family still has and which we still hang on our Christmas trees.

These things are special, and we treat them with care and respect. We might even say that these things are holy.

Here's another example. I have been to the tomb of the unknown soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. All day and all night, a soldier is stationed there to keep watch. People who come there understand this is a sacred place, and they are reverent and silent when there.

We treat these things with great respect and reverence because they are not ordinary. They have something special about them. They have something very good about them.

Now, when we say that God is holy, what we mean is that He is all good. In fact, what we mean is that He is infinitely good. We mean that there is no evil in God, no imperfection and no flaw or defect or blemish. He is pure goodness. We call that goodness holiness. So when we say that God is holy, we mean that He is like all of the special things I've mentioned only much, much more. This holiness of God is the reason why Isaiah and Saint Peter and the Seraphim acted as they did in God's presence. They felt very much out of place.

But there is also another reason why Isaiah and Saint Peter reacted as they did. They were humble. They weren't about to pretend that they were God's equals. Compared to God, they knew they were nothing at all ...

There is an incompatibility, a profound difference between us and God and even between God and the angels. We are not like God. God is infinitely perfect and we are imperfect. God is all good and we are sinners.

That is why when Isaiah and Saint Peter realized they were in the presence of God, they felt so out of place. That is why even the Seraphim covered their faces and their feet in the presence of God. They felt unworthy. It would be like someone on a scooter trying to keep up with a Ford Mustang or like hanging a child's drawing next to a painting by Rembrandt. These things would be out of place. Next to God, we are all very much out of place.

That said, many people still have the idea that they are more or less God's equals, and some of them even presume to tell God what to do. If they don't like certain teachings or commandments, these folks just ignore them, or they say they don't apply to them or that if Jesus was walking the Earth today, He would make an exception for them. Sadly, this kind of arrogance blinds them to the truth. This kind of arrogance makes it impossible for them to ever know God as He truly is in all of His glory and goodness and love.

Our Catholic faith has many holy things. The people and the things we call holy are holy because they all have some share in the goodness of God. However, that goodness which makes them holy is only a faint echo of the goodness of God. Humble people can see this. People who acknowledge their sinfulness can see this. The arrogant and the proud cannot.

So, if we wish to know God as He is, we must humble ourselves before God. We must acknowledge our lowliness and sinfulness before Him. Then and only then can God raise us up so that we can see Him face to face. It was this kind of humility that the Seraphim and Isaiah and Saint Peter had which inspired them to cry out “**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts! All the earth is full of His glory!**” Amen.