

CHAPTER ONE

THE CALL TO HOLINESS

THE SAINTS WHO ENCOURAGE AND ACCOMPANY US

‘3’ WE LEARN in the Letter to the Hebrews to gather up courage, stamina, and hope, and to ‘run the race that is set before us’. The text assures us that we are not alone but are part of a great crowd of others who help us advance toward the goal of holiness, and these may include our mothers or grandmothers, friends or neighbours, even when their lives were not perfect.

‘4’ FORTHIS REASON, we can each say that we are guided by ‘the friends of God’. Being in the family of God makes it possible for us to achieve what we could never do alone. The saints who walk with us also protect and guide us; they sustain and carry us when times are difficult.

‘5’ WHENEVER we canonise a saint, we recognise someone who lived his or her life for others, even up to death. An example for us in this regard is Blessed Maria Gabriella Sagheddu who dedicated her life as a Trappist nun to praying for Christian unity.

THE SAINTS ‘NEXT DOOR’

‘6’ WE aren’t thinking here only of those who are already canonised, but also of many others among the People of God. We do not go to the heart of the Lord alone; we go there only as part of a rich community, blessed by God, called by God, and strengthened by God. God, in other words, draws us to himself as a people in our particular moment in history and place in life.

‘7’ WHO ARE YOU? Did you ever think God might call you to holiness? Parents who raise your kids with love, you are called. Men and women who

work every day to support your families, you are called. Sick and older adults, you are called. Senior members of religious communities, you are called. I like to call this ‘the middle class of holiness’, saints among us who strive to hear God and follow God’s way.

‘8’ YES, the humblest members of our community are often the ones whom God chooses to be a model for us all. As Vatican II taught in Chapter Twelve of the great Constitution on the Church, all the baptised share in the prophetic work of witnessing to God’s love. They touch our lives in ways we don’t always see or understand. Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross reminds us that we may not know until we are in the light of heaven about all those whose loving touch formed and shaped us.

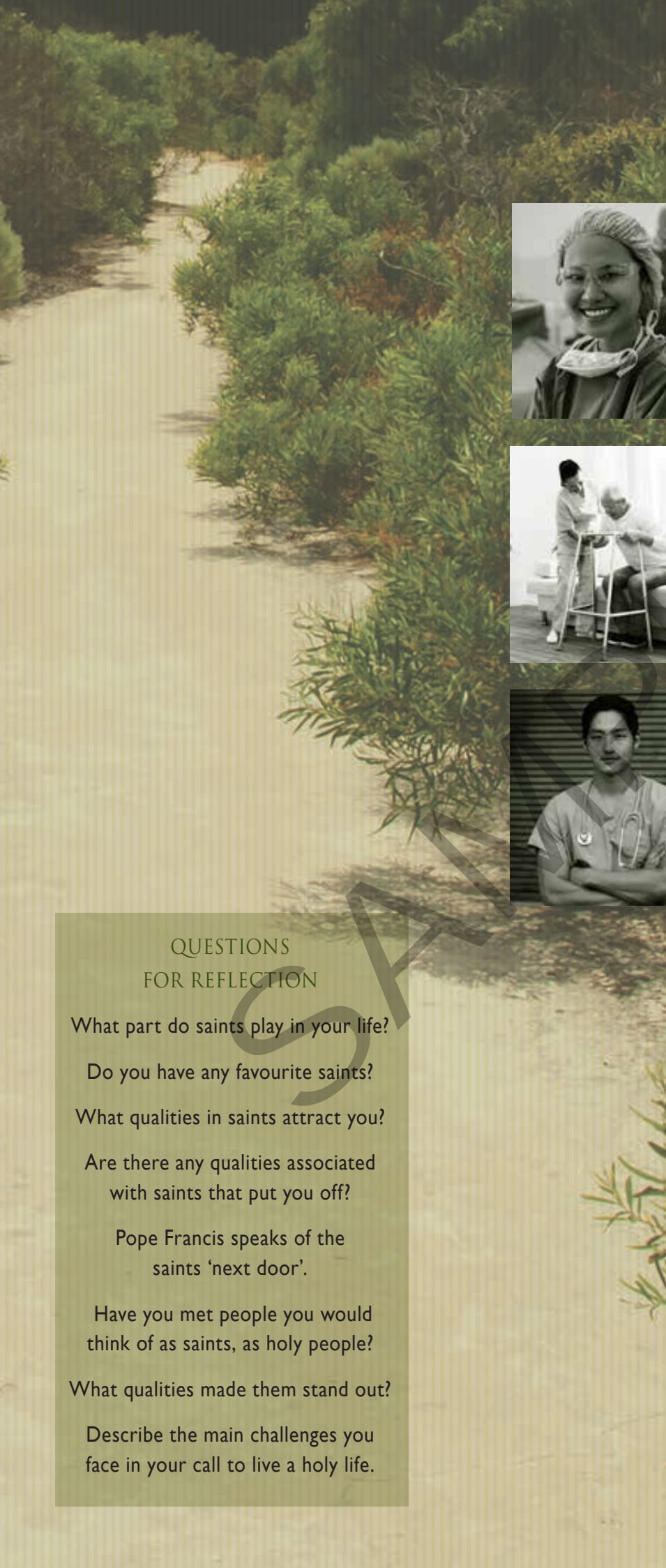
‘9’ ALL CHRISTIANS experience this call to holiness, and people also experience it beyond the Christian faith as God works in mysterious ways. Holiness is ‘the most attractive face of the Church’ because when men and women sacrifice themselves on behalf of others, it is compelling.

THE LORD CALLS

‘10’ I WANT to focus here primarily on the call to holiness that the Lord has sounded in each of our hearts. Again, as the Constitution on the Church teaches in Article Eleven, the Lord calls all the faithful, regardless of their state in life, to holiness. This call isn’t reserved only for the ordained or religious. God calls each of us by name.

‘11’ WE SHOULD not become discouraged or begin to think that we are not worthy or capable of holiness.





If we know about someone who has given himself or herself completely, such as St Teresa of Calcutta, we should not think that we can never do what she did. We are not meant to copy St Teresa or anyone else; God has called her to that mission, but that doesn't mean God has called us to the same work. God calls each of us to our own mission, and we must follow 'the specific path the Lord has in mind for us'. There are many ways to be holy witnesses to God's love, as St John of the Cross has reminded us.

'12' THERE HAVE been, for example, many holy women such as Saints Hildegard, Bridget, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Ávila, or Thérèse of Lisieux. But there have also been many forgotten women whose courage and faith helped transform the family or society in which they lived.

'13' I HOPE this will excite us! I hope it will encourage us to discern how the Lord is calling each of us. As God taught us in Jeremiah (1:5), 'Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you'.

FOR YOU, TOO

'14' AGAIN, to be holy doesn't mean we must be ordained or join a religious order. We're tempted to believe that holiness means withdrawing from everyday life. In fact, being holy means living our lives with love and giving witness to that in everything we do. If you're called to be a religious sister, then do that with joy and commitment. If you're called to be married, love and care for your spouse. If you're called to work for a living, do so with integrity. If you're called to be a grandparent, teach the

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What part do saints play in your life?

Do you have any favourite saints?

What qualities in saints attract you?

Are there any qualities associated with saints that put you off?

Pope Francis speaks of the saints 'next door'.

Have you met people you would think of as saints, as holy people?

What qualities made them stand out?

Describe the main challenges you face in your call to live a holy life.

little ones to love Jesus. If you're called to be in authority, work for the common good.

'15' BE OPEN TO GOD in whatever situation you find yourself in life. Remember, you have the power of the Spirit within you who gives you all the strength and courage you need for this. Also, you have the Church and, in the Church, you have the guiding hand of God through Scripture, liturgy, holy places, and a whole crowd of saints.

'16' THE KIND OF HOLINESS I'm describing here is lived in small ways most of the time. For example, a woman goes shopping and meets a neighbour; she avoids gossip. Later, her children need her time; she gives it even if she is tired. She feels anxiety, so she prays. Later, she meets a homeless person, but she stops to say a kind word to him or her. Each moment is a step toward holiness.

'17' WE LIVE this holiness in the particular situation in which we find ourselves each day.

'18' WE CAN LIVE with this kind of everyday holiness because God gives us the grace to do it. Grace empowers us, it fills us with God's own life, and it is always enough for whatever we are called to do. No matter what our weakness, whatever our life situation we are in, grace is powerful enough to help us live with love.

YOUR MISSION IN CHRIST

'19' GOD GIVES each of us a mission in life, and we live that out in our specific moment of time.

'20' THE FULLEST meaning of our lifelong mission is to reflect the self-giving love of Jesus, to die to ourselves in every aspect of our life. In doing this, we echo the earthly life of



Christ himself: our private times and our communal times, our encounters with outcasts and the poor, and all the ways in which he showed his self-giving love. As we meditate on Christ's life, we gradually incorporate his ministry into our own lives.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What do you see as the important small decisions in your own life which will lead from mediocrity to holiness?

What do you see as the most important calls to us as Australian Catholics in the Church today?

In what ways do you think we can link our lives to the stories of Jesus' life?

In what ways can that be helpful?

'21' GOD IS LOVE, and holiness is living in that divine love and charity based on the example of Jesus. Each of our lives is a message to the world, and the message is the same: God loves you; he walks with you; he has given himself entirely for you, and now he calls you to do the same.

'22' THE LORD SPEAKS through your life, but let's not get caught up in the small things you may do. You will make mistakes and experience failure; not everything a saint says or does is holy. But don't give up because it is the totality of your life that matters.

'23' I INVITE YOU to listen closely to God in prayer and recognise how your call to holiness is embedded in the people, activities, and situations of your daily life. I invite you to 'allow the Spirit to forge in you' how you will show the face of God to the world.

'24' MAY YOU come to know the message that God wants to speak to the world through your life. May you let yourself be renewed and filled with the Holy Spirit. You're on a mission, as I said above, one that is unique to you. Even if you make mistakes and fail, God stays

with you and holds you up; God gives you strength and remains with you. You have all the grace needed for your mission.

ACTIVITY THAT SANCTIFIES

'25' REMEMBER that the call to holiness we're exploring here is also

MOST OF US trade in our saints from time to time for new, shiny ones.

When I was very young my official heroes were saints, available for all occasions. St Joseph and Thérèse of Lisieux, pictured on pastel-coloured holy cards that the Sisters gave me, were calm and gentle. Some saints were of practical help in time of trouble: St Antony for finding things and St Jude for when I was between a rock and a hard place.

A little later on, saintly heroes were conscripted into tribal and family wars. My school saint was clearly better than my sister's. But my name-saint, St Andrew, was a disappointment. With a father named James and brothers called John and Peter, I was galled to notice that their saints were part of Jesus' inner circle, while my Andrew was a mere hanger-on. I wished he could have got his act together and been more assertive.

In boyhood, saints were put on the shelf and replaced by muscular heroes: spin bowlers and gentlemen footballers. A little later on, as my interests developed, teachers or older students who were dedicated, friendly and learned became heroes.

In time, though, I came to realise that my heroes and saints had feet of clay. They were not the perfect people I would like to be but were very like myself.

For all of us, that discovery is a turning point. It can lead to disillusion, to giving up on the people we have made into saints and heroes and on their institutions.

The alternative is to rethink our expectations of saints, heroes and of ourselves. Saints do not always act perfectly. They acknowledge their limitations and weaknesses, but see something that matters and try to live by it.

My heroes now are saints of daily life: people who are real, are deep, and for whom God and people matter. One swore like a trooper, but was like a lion in defending the homeless and people in his care. And when he spoke of the Blessed Trinity he seemed to be taken into another world. A refugee mother of seven saw only her failures. But she had put at risk her own and her children's lives in order to help the old people in a Khmer Rouge-controlled village.

Saints and heroes are gifts to be housed in our imagination, given to us for celebration and encouragement.

ANDREW HAMILTON, ADAPTED FROM MADONNA MAGAZINE





and at the same time a call to build the Reign of God. The two are inseparable. You will experience great happiness in your life when you learn the art of self-giving love and give yourself to this mission, body and soul.

•26• IN A SENSE, we're each called to become a 'contemplative' in the midst of a busy life of service and love. Being a contemplative doesn't mean withdrawing to a quiet place and never coming back. It means, rather, loving silence while interacting with others; finding peace and quiet while working hard for justice; seeking prayer while serving your family, community, or the Church.

•27• ENGAGEMENT with the world is not 'second best' to prayer and contemplation. They go hand in hand. The pathway to interior peace and holiness is the same as the pathway to building up the Reign of God. It isn't so much that we have accepted an arbitrary call to mission as that our very lives, oriented to God and flowing from the Spirit, are a mission.

•28• IF OUR VERY BEING in the world is the mission on which God has sent us, then we must embrace that with humility and peace of heart. The 'spirituality of your life' connects you to your family, work, and society.

•29• THIS DOES NOT MEAN we should avoid quiet and contemplation. Quite the contrary! Noisy gadgets and distractions fill today's world. If we are going to hear God's voice in this din, then we must step back and be in dialogue with the Lord. In the midst of all our daily work, we can find time for

this. So, when a quiet moment presents itself, when we awaken in the night, as we prepare to pray the Mass – these are times when this dialogue may occur. And when we are in crisis, all the more do we find it necessary to speak with the Lord.

•30• WE MUST GUARD against the temptation to be buried in modern technology or busyness because this can draw us away from our mission and from being our truest self.

•31• I INVITE YOU to develop a spirit of holiness, one that will be evident in both your solitude and your service. In this way, every moment of your life can be an expression of self-giving love and a step along the pathway to holiness.

•32• 'DO NOT BE AFRAID of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality, or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self'. God is with us, and that brings us great comfort.

•33• THE MORE we grow in holiness, the more fruit we bear for the world.

•34• IF YOU WANT to be fully human and alive, then embrace your call to holiness in everyday life, following the example of Jesus: Die to yourself. Forgive generously. Share your wealth with the poor. Attend to those around you who are in need. Do not turn a blind eye to the immigrant or the homeless. Are you weak and sinful? Yes. But you're also strong and holy. Holiness builds the bridge between our weakness and God's grace. Let us all become saints!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Our personal journey to God involves 'a commitment to build with him the kingdom of love, justice and universal peace'. Can you imagine what that kingdom would look like in Australia? How might we contribute to it?

In what ways might we be active in following Jesus and not lose our inner quiet?



PRAYER FOR GENEROSITY

*Dearest Lord, teach me
to be generous,
teach me to serve you
as I should,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to
heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and ask not for reward,
save that of knowing that I
do your most holy will.*