

COLUMNISTS

Each of us can be the picture of holiness

As I was growing up, there was an unconscious assumption that seemed to permeate Catholicism. It hinted at a "bi-level" call to holiness. On the high level were priests and religious, who were apparently called to holiness. Everybody else seemed to be called to something else. I was never sure what that was, but it seemed not be holiness.

The theology of the Second Vatican Council set that notion aside, loudly declaring that everyone is called to holiness. Each of the "states of life," whether ordination, single life, marriage, or religious vows, includes a call to follow Christ and to pursue holiness. The council assured us that there are not two levels of Catholic existence, with one calling some to holiness and the other calling people to something besides holiness.

Of course, there was no blueprint laid out by the council about how one was supposed to "become holy." In today's scheme of self-help books and how-to techniques, we might look for some kind of holy-making manual outlining the shortcuts to holiness. I like formulas and clear prescriptions for achieving goals, so a guidebook like that would be welcome.

Unfortunately, however, I have found few books or other helps assisting us in discovering how ordinary life becomes a venue for forming us in holiness. I'm not even sure that I know what we mean by the very word. Somewhere in my imagination when I think of holiness, I picture serene people calmly conducting controlled and ordered lives while interiorly



BY PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

the
moral
life

enjoying pious thoughts and transcending the bustle and conflict that comprise my often-harried existence. But these sorts of images suggest that I really haven't moved very far beyond the bi-level model of pre-Vatican II days, since this picture of holiness fits more into what I assume must be the fruit of a contemplative religious life.

I suspect this may be true for other people, too. I remember speaking once with a woman who, while a very active citizen, energetic and engaged in lots of activities, seemed to me to be quite holy, too. But when the subject came up, she assured me that she was not holy at all. When I asked why she thought that, she assured me that her notion of holy was rather like my own imagined picture: serene, withdrawn, solitary, pursuing holy thoughts and spending idle time in meditation and quiet repose. Her life did not seem to be characterized by these sorts of moments, so she assumed she was not "holy."

It seems to me that we still have some distance to go in trying to appreciate how it is that we are made holy in the real, prac-

tical, busy lives we actually live. We need to come to deeper understanding of even our most mundane and secular activities as having the potential to connect us with God. I can think of three examples that illustrate this. One comes from a friend who teaches theology at a college in Maryland. He insists, over the objections of his colleagues, that members of the theology department meet regularly with faculty from the business school. Theologians and pastoral staff often assume, I think, that business is an activity that has little to say to religion. Sometimes one detects an attitude from church people that seems to assert business may even be a bit "tainted."

My friend has a different interpretation. He repeats often that business and the professions are human activities, and all human activities can yield goodness and contribute to our appreciation of the world and God's action in it. He thinks that theologians who don't learn from businesspeople about the practices of their trade and the responsibilities entailed by it, are inadequate theologians. The views of my friend in this regard remind me over and over again that all our activities can contribute to our experience of faith.

The second example comes from a student I once taught who once explained to me how packing his children's lunches offered him a profound insight into God. He told me that each morning he included a joke or other little message in the lunch of each of his sons. As the morning unfolded, this father would anticipate the joy of

each child as the lunch was opened and the joke discovered. Then in the evenings over supper the three would laugh again about it. My student assured me that his anticipation of his sons' joy, and their later sharing about that offered him insight into how God must rejoice as we come to discover the wonders of creation, and as we later "converse" with God about them. This story illustrates for me how one individual had learned to let life's common tasks and chores offer insight into God.

The third example comes from the council document on religious freedom. A passage from that document states: "We are bound to follow our conscience faithfully in all our activity so that we may come to God, who is our last end." This sentence indicates that decisions we make about our life, in conscience, actually become our way to God. The passage presumes that life is a journey toward God, and lets us know that as we enter into the serious decisions of our life, we actually come to God, the purpose and meaning of our decisions.

Like the other two examples, this passage from a church document points out to us that it is not just the time we spend consciously contemplating God that brings us to greater union with God. Rather, all of these examples indicate ways in which the ordinary lives of "ordinary" people provide ways of response to the call to holiness that comes to all Christians.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

St. Ann's Community

Presents its

Second Annual Ethics Seminar

"End of Life Issues"

Featuring Edward J. Mahoney, Ph.D.

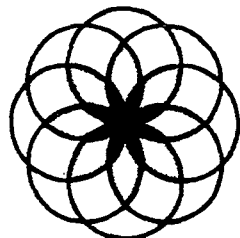
Director, Graduate Theology & Pastoral Ministry
St. Michael's College (VT)

A Panel discussion including Kathleen Quinlan, Marv Mich, and Fr. Peter Bayer will follow Dr. Mahoney's presentation.

Wednesday, December 13th
7:00 - 9:00 pm

ST. ANN'S HOME CHAPEL

On the campus of St. Ann's Community
1500 Portland Avenue
For more information, please call 544-6000 x346



S T. A N N ' S
C O M M U N I T Y

Full of Life

PREVENT OVERPOPULATION.
SPAY OR NEUTER EVERY DOG AND CAT.

CALL 223-1330 OR VISIT YOUR VETERINARIAN TODAY.

WWW.LOUDPOPORG HUMANESOLUTIONS.ORG

SPACE DONATED TO THE AD COUNCIL
AS A PUBLIC SERVICE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Catholic Courier will not
publish a December 28 issue.

Kids' Answers from page 12: 1. Herod, 2. Zechariah, 3. John, 4. Gabriel, 5. Mary, 6. Jesus