



## Little Holiness

Fr. Augustine Wetta

Our readings today include the startlingly expansive exhortation: “Whatever you eat, whatever you drink, whatever you do at all, do it for the glory of God.” *Whatever* I eat? (one is inclined to wonder) *Whatever* I drink? Is Saint Paul really suggesting that I might...eat a taco for the glory of god? That I might...drink a banana smoothie...for the *glory of God*? And does he really mean *whatever* I do, I can do for the *glory of God*? Can I brush my teeth for the glory of god? Can I wait in line at the supermarket...for the glory of god? Can I change a light bulb for the glory of god? If we are to take Saint Paul at his word, the answer is yes. Whatever you do, do it for the glory of god. Anything whatsoever.

To be sure, Saint Paul’s exhortation has everything to do with the dietary controversies of the early Christian Church. But there’s no working around that last phrase and its claim that we can do just about anything...for the glory of God. Yet, if glorifying god is *that* easy, we have to wonder why there aren’t more saints in the world?

Of course, you can’t necessarily identify a saint just by looking at him. But then again, many of the stories of our saints are full of wonderful and wildly spectacular episodes which prove beyond doubt the holiness of the parties involved. Saint Dunstan held a demon by the nose with a pair of jewelry pliers, Saint Joseph of Cupertino prayed so hard he actually levitated right out his bedroom window, Saint Rose of Lima sat up in her coffin in the middle of her own funeral. Saint Anselm, according to Eadmer, his eleventh-century biographer, predicted that a trout of unusual size would be served to him for supper—and it was!\* [\*If you don’t believe me, just read Eadmer’s biography of Anselm, Book I,



Section 17 entitled *How a trout of unusual size was caught for his supper as he foretold*. And while you're at it, be sure to read section 18 entitled *How, as he had predicted, a sturgeon was unexpectedly brought to a man who was entertaining him*. And that's the patron of this very parish!] These are certainly some of the more spectacular, more obvious signs by which our saints have been identified. And of course, the more spectacular the sign, the more likely they are to be recounted.

We have a tendency, therefore, to think that we must work wonders, cast out demons, raise the dead, levitate, bilocate, have visions, or make prophecies to be a saint.

But that isn't necessarily the case. Saint Therese of Lisieux liked to say "Our Lord needs from us neither great deeds nor profound thoughts. Neither intelligence nor talents. But he *cherishes* simplicity."

Or, in the words of Blessed Mother Theresa: "There are no great deeds. Only small deeds with great love."

I remember, back when I was a college student studying archaeology in Rome, I met a group of monks who lived on the Aventine hill. These were the first monks I had ever met, and I was impressed by the way they lived. Moreover, I contrived to spend a month with them working odd jobs around the monastery in exchange for room and board. So one afternoon, the electricity went out in the monastery and one of the monks was stuck in the elevator for three and a half hours. Three and a half hours, he sat in the pitch dark waiting for the lights to come back on. And when they did, he emerged from the elevator...beaming. No one even knew he was in there, because he never called for help. When I asked him why he wasn't upset, he seemed surprised that I should even ask. "Upset," he said, "I just got to spend three hours in a pitch dark elevator!" As though that explained it. When I pressed him further, he explained, "How often do you get a chance like that to work on your prayer?"



And I remember thinking to myself at the time, if I could learn to live like that monk, I could be a happy man. And I was right. If one learns to do everything—to eat, drink, live for the glory of God—then there is never a wasted moment. Never a dull, futile, or useless experience. Even sin begins to lose its sting, because everything is for the glory of God. One's life becomes charged with light and hope and joy.

So here's an idea: How about, instead of relegating holiness to an hour on Sunday or ten minutes before bed; instead of treating holiness as the exclusive domain of mystics and martyrs; instead of waiting for signs and wonders, let us dedicate our everyday activities—our cereal eating, our tooth brushing, our tv watching and porch sweeping and traffic navigating... Dedicate it all to god. Make periodic, daily offerings of simple ordinary things to god. Not wait for the levitation or the bilocation. Instead offer the traffic jam, the peanut butter sandwich, the newly mopped floor. Offer these daily sacrifices and pleasures—and even the little sorts of things that are neither sacrifices nor pleasures—offer them all to god as prayer.

And you can add to those offerings this short prayer of Saint Therese of Liseux (a saint, mind you, who never worked a miracle in all her short life): "Jesus, help me to simplify my life by learning what you want me to be - and becoming that person."

Who knows? There may even be an unusually large trout in it for you.