

The 34th Annual Summer Conference—Building the Church

A Retreat for All Ages

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CONFERENCE ONE

BASIL HUME: THE MAN

In the whole question of communicating the word of God it is sincerity that matters: not the clever thought, the neat turn of phrase. What matters is genuine sincerity, which can come through the most banal thought and the clumsiest sentence. How often it is true that it is the *man* to whom one is listening, not the words he is saying. And surely sincerity has to be the quality of a person who is in contact with Christ our Lord.

—Basil Hume, *Searching for God*

FOR REFLECTION:

- ✓ What are other qualities of a person who is in contact with Christ the Lord?
- ✓ How do we help one another become more in contact with Christ the Lord?

HOLINESS AND THE PILGRIM SEARCH FOR GOD

As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, for it is written, “Be holy because I am holy.”

(1 Peter 1:15-16)

All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society.

(*Lumen Gentium*, 40)

Charity, as the bond of perfection and the fullness of the law, rules over all the means of attaining holiness and gives life to these same means.

It is charity which guides us to our final end. It is the love of God and the love of one's neighbor which points out the true disciple of Christ.

(*Lumen Gentium*, 42)

CARDINAL HUME CHALLENGES US TO RESPOND TO THE CALL TO HOLINESS:

At the outset of my ministry I ask you for your prayers, your understanding and your help. To remind myself constantly of the Christian calling I share with you all, and to be enlightened and strengthened to carry out with my brother-bishops the role entrusted to us of leadership and animation. And I put before you today a single appeal. Listen to the call of the Holy Spirit. The call today is clear. It is the call to holiness—to be first-rate in all we do, not second-rate. We are called to be men and women of integrity. We are called to be fully human—and, dare we say it, more than human, for we are called to share in the very life of God through the mystery of Christ's redeeming action. Here lies the secret. It is to recognise that God loves each one of us and that the strength of this love makes us bigger than we know ourselves to be, makes us Christ-like. It is a call to each of us as Christians. May we respond together in total generosity.¹

FOR REFLECTION:

- ✓ What is holiness?
- ✓ What are the qualities essential for the acclamation “holy person”?

CARDINAL HUME’S QUALITIES IN HOLY PEOPLE:

“There are, as I have observed, at least three qualities in holy people.

- ✓ The **first** is this: they have discovered the love of God and responded to it. The test that this love of God is authentic is the manner whereby it overflows into the world around them, their neighbours, but quite especially those who are in need and perhaps the most neglected.
- ✓ The **second** quality is that they have an unbounded confidence in God and in his providence, trusting him with a trust which may seem at times almost unreasonable.
- ✓ The **third** quality is that they have a certain positive zest for life. Very holy people are never bored, never cynical, never unkind, never bigotedly critical. They have a zest for life.”²

FOR REFLECTION:

- ✓ Can you give examples of holy people you have known personally?
- ✓ Can you compare those people with those who are officially affirmed, i.e., those formally canonized, whom you admire or put your trust?

¹ Basil Hume, “Address in Westminster Cathedral on the Day of Hume’s Installation, March 25, 1976,” *Tablet*, April 3, 1976, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/3rd-april-1976/19/home-news>.

² Basil Hume, *Light in the Lord: Reflections on Priesthood* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 150.

A LAST HINT FOR HOLINESS: “It is to remain a little person. By this I mean: to remain small in my own estimate of myself, to be unimportant whatever the position I hold or the talents I have. It is to remember that only one thing matters, and this what God thinks about me. To be high in His regard is the highest ambition any person can have. Smile at yourself, at your failures, at your spiritual incompetence. Have a sense of humour. It does not matter if others take you seriously; God will.

If you become holy, it is because God made you so. You will not know it anyway. Just keep on trying. That is your part. Success? That is God’s gift. And why not be cheerful? The Lord has risen indeed, and has much to share with you. You are precious and important to Him, so why be sad? There is a French saying which states: “A sad saint is a poor kind of saint” (Un saint triste est un triste saint).”³

FOR REFLECTION:

- ✓ How are Hume’s qualities of a holy person related to a pilgrim’s search for God?
- ✓ Is true holiness only found among Christians or can it be found among those of other faiths?

Strive for peace with everyone, and for that holiness without which no one will see God.
(Hebrews 12:14)

PRAY FOR THE GIFT OF HOLINESS.

³ Basil Hume, *To Be a Pilgrim: A Spiritual Notebook* (London: SPCK Classics, 2009), 115-116.