

How to create a culture of holiness within your classroom

Introduction

We teachers and catechists sometimes tend to shun the word “holiness.” We may believe that only saints and people of extreme faith are really holy. Or we may believe that holiness requires a heroic effort of Catholic piety. Or we may even believe that holiness doesn’t have much to do with teaching religion.



The Second Vatican Council, meeting in Rome from 1962 to 1965, reminded us forcefully that **we are all called to holiness**. We are all called to follow the footsteps of Jesus and practice self-giving, self-emptying love. Throughout his life, Christ taught us what this would mean: be the big one, forgive seventy times seven times, love your enemies, do good to those who harm you, turn the other cheek, and give away the material things you hold most dear.

Holiness isn’t merely about saying your prayers and showing up for Mass. You can do those things but remain far away from the heart of the Lord. Holiness is a lifestyle, and yes, **we can teach this to our students**. We can show it to them by how we live and we can help them build this holiness lifestyle into their own lives.

Here’s how to get started:

1. Prayer

Before you even start teaching, while you’re preparing your notes for class, let your heart move toward Christ. Be quiet for a moment, and just let yourself be connected to the heart of Jesus. Become the “earthen vessel” through whom he will touch your students with love. Open yourself to following the pathway that will be set before you with your students. The gestures, words, and sacred moments needed for your teaching will all be given to you.



2. Let your students tell their stories

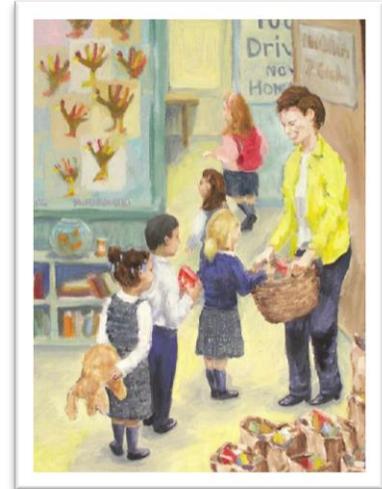
We learn how to be holy by looking back over our shoulders at what has happened in our lives. By glancing backward like that, we can more plainly see the hand of God working. The call to holiness is embedded in a hundred moments of daily life when we have the chance to choose either self-giving love or selfishness. What are those moments and how do they connect to the doctrine, tradition, custom, or church teaching that is in your lesson?

3. Make faith real

It is easy to get the impression that Christian or Catholic faith exists up in the sky, beyond us somehow, and all we do is stand here and look up at it. But in fact, faith lives in the very fabric of everyday life. It's part of how we go through each day. Help your students make this connection. Christ is immediately present with us, standing beside us as friend and companion, in the faces and hands and feet of those with whom we share life. Affirm the gifts and contributions of your learners. Help them see that they are created and good.

4. Be a role model

Kids know a phony when they see one. What you teach them has to be evident in your own life. Your love for them is first of course, but your kindness, mercy, and compassion on all of creation, on all people of the earth, and on the poor and vulnerable – that's what they will see. Do you notice how Pope Francis treats others? He withholds judgment, speaks with kindness, laughs and smiles easily, and sees himself as a humble pilgrim on the journey of faith. Let that be your example.



5. Drumbeats

Help your students become aware that being part of the parish is important. Parish life is designed to provide a drumbeat and set a cadence in our lives. Help your students hear this drumbeat. How is the drumbeat sounded? Weekly Sunday Mass. It's vital. In it, the drumbeat is sounded through the readings, singing, praying, communion, and dismissal. We can hear that drumbeat in our inner ear, and we march by it all week long. Its cadence becomes the cadence of our lives. And if we don't have that, we will march to some other drummer: materialism, television, or even hate and prejudice.

6. Remember the role that parents must play

The home lives of your students are more important than what happens in your classroom. We all know this. We can reach out to the parents in a meaningful way to make sure they help their son or daughter along the pathway to holiness. One of the best ways to do this is to send a weekly email home in which you give one simple thought about the lessons you are teaching along with one quote from Scripture. We suggest you use the Catholic edition of **The Message**[®] as your Bible. It's written in contemporary English and is powerful to read and pray with. [See more about it here.](#)

Here's an example: Suppose your lesson is about why it's important to be active in the church. (We chose this example at random.) It is obviously essential that the parents reinforce what you teach and model the value of being part of the parish. In the end, they will be the real teachers of their child. To help them, tell them what you're teaching by way of a simple email. You might write something like this:

Dear parents,

In religion class right now your child is learning how important it is to be part of the church. To be in the parish community and attend Sunday Mass helps us live as true followers of Jesus. When we learn, pray, and work together we all grow in happiness and holiness. Ever since the earliest Christians, gathering together has been part of our Christian life. The more you can affirm this and make it part of your household, the better your child will learn it.

Here's what the Bible says about being in the church. This is from *Acts of the Apostles* which tells about how the first Christians lived:

That day about three thousand took [Peter] at his word, were baptized, and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.

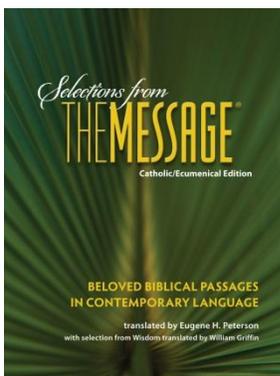
Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met.

They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved. (Acts 2:41-47 – from *The Message*).

Thank you for providing your child with a home in which the Catholic faith is important and valued. By working together – me as the teacher and you as the parent – we can offer your child the wonderful gift of faith!

With all my good wishes,
Wanda, the catechist

Footnote



We really like this Bible! For so many people, reading the Bible is difficult. They want to read it and they try, but they get bogged down in the language. This is a faithful translation from Greek and Hebrew, and is the Catholic edition, but it uses contemporary English. Reading it is a pleasure. Most people find they can't put it down! [To see more, go here on our website.](#)