

As we begin Holy Week, let's consider holiness itself. The major religions observe holy days or "high holy days" which remind the faithful that the ultimate goal of life is holiness—that everything in one's life is ordered for the purpose of holiness.

Holiness is participation in the life of God. It is beyond my control and my ability to attain on my own. I can only be open to receive it. It is a grace, a gift that has neither been earned nor merited but given because God is that good and generous. Saint Paul speaks of his experience of grace when he writes "It is no longer I who live, but Christ living in me."

For action-oriented individuals, it is very uncomfortable for things to be beyond one's control. For them *doing* is more important than *being* or *becoming*. For them holiness is often mistranslated into concepts like success, wholeness, self-actualization or overcoming of one's faults. There is little correlation between holiness and wholeness. There is no direct causal relationship between holiness and success.

Saints experience a distinctive paradox of grace. The closer one gets to God, the more that person experiences how different God is from them. The great saints refer to themselves as great sinners, sharing more connection with "the least among us" than with God. They are a conduit for holiness, even though they themselves don't feel holy.

When we encounter these holy ones we feel edified and inspired to be better people. The religious founders of Catholic health care's sponsoring communities reveal this kind of consciousness in their writings. They have called us to follow their example. We are drawn to follow them because of their depth of living as well as their work.

As we enter the sacred time of Holy Week, let us think about receiving God's ultimate gift of grace. Instead of asking "Where do I want to go?" ask these questions:

What is happening in my life?

How is God helping me to grow in holiness?