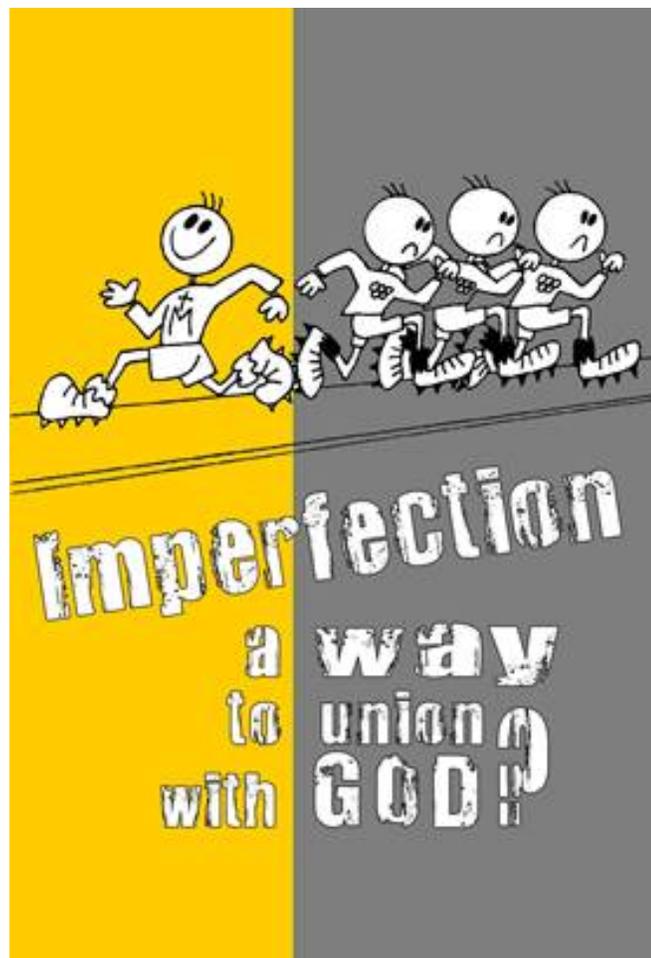


Beloved friends in Christ Jesus Our Lord,

This summer of 2018 we are again blessed by an invitation to “vacation with God” at one of the Families of Nazareth Movement retreats. At first glance, many obstacles and objections may present themselves to us – finances, responsibilities, health, reticence – tempting us to turn away from considering this spiritual treasure for ourselves. But if we allow the desire to awaken in us, our Mother Mary who always wants only the best for us, can open the way for this precious meeting with her Son. Do you want to be a saint? Do you think it is even possible?



Our theme this year is inspired by the book recently published in English, *The Way of Imperfection: Holiness for the Poor*, by French Canadian priest, André Daigneault. I would like to encourage you with a few quotes taken from this work.

Is holiness reserved for the virtuous and the perfect? Can the poor, the injured of all kinds – the sinners with their wounds and through their falls – honestly aspire to holiness?

The saint recognizes himself as a sinner always in the state of conversion, and each sinner, as weak as he is, must recognize himself as a saint in the making.

Jesus' disciple is not called to virtue but to holiness, and holiness is not the search for human perfection, concentrated on our efforts or generosity.

If the word of Jesus – “the good news is announced to the poor” – is true, then holiness must be offered and be accessible to the most wounded and destitute. One

must never confuse holiness with moral perfection realized through human virtues. Any person, poor or wounded, even marginal psychologically or morally, can aspire to holiness starting with his real situation.

“The ladder of holiness is reverse, turned toward the bottom, and descends always deeper into the abyss of smallness and nothingness. We have perhaps imagined perfection in the form of progression or ascent, which is the fruit of self-will.

This is precisely the contrary of Christian holiness because, in a subtle way, it could become our ascent. We could falsely believe that our generosity and goodwill would render us capable of becoming saints and could forget the ‘without me, you can do nothing’ of Jesus.”

In the Magnificat, the Virgin Mary says that God has cast down from their thrones those who have placed themselves on the pedestal of their false virtue, those who have thought themselves to be mighty and able to do great things by themselves.

We must change the way we consider holiness. We have too often imagined the path of holiness as a climb, an uninterrupted progression, an ascent toward the summits of spirituality by the fruits of our own efforts and goodwill. This image of holiness gives privilege mainly to the strong, the virtuous, the willful, and it consists in believing that goodwill and generosity would, in themselves, render us capable of attaining holiness.

The holiness proposed by Christ is not holiness derived from the natural order, but holiness received in our poverty. Christ came for sinners and the weak, not for the strong and those who are well. Some people have natural attributes for attaining holiness; they will always be in danger of what one can call the courage of the proud and the strong.

Nevertheless, this scheme of human perfection based on will and ascetic practices is the exact opposite of the holiness proposed by Jesus in the Gospel. We mourn the recent departure to eternal life of our spiritual friend, Father Bob O’Neill. A loss to us here, but now a heavenly advocate for us. How he loved being at the summer retreats and serving God’s people! It was a source of consolation and joy for him to see God’s love poured out in abundance into their hearts. Through many years of illness, Fr. Bob still longed to attend the retreats. A humble child of Mary, always willing to share the gift of his weakness, He would want to get better only to be able to serve at the summer retreats. He never gave up that desire.

What about those of us who could make it? Let us respond to our interior yearning to be refreshed by the Holy Spirit. If we discover obstacles to this yearning, let us ask Fr. Bob to intercede for this grace – to help us to have his yearning.

Yours in Christ through Mary,

Fr. Jarek Zaniewski

National Moderator of the Families of Nazareth Movement