Vatican
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A woman religious wearing a white habit puts a hand on Pope Francis' cheek

Sr. Melania Balini, a member of the Ursulines of Mary Immaculate Virgin of Gandino, caresses Pope Francis' face during an audience at the Vatican Nov. 16, 2023. She is postulator of the sainthood cause of Mother Dositea Bottani, a former superior general of the order, and she was taking part in a study conference promoted by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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The holiness of individuals and families gives life to the entire Catholic community, Pope Francis said.

The call to holiness "is not only a personal event, but also a communal one," he said in an audience at the Vatican Nov. 16 with people taking part in a conference promoted by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. The conference Nov. 13-16 focused on the communal dimension of holiness, particularly in marriages and families.

"When God calls the individual, it is always for the good of everyone, as in the cases of Abraham and Moses, Peter and Paul. He calls the individual for a mission," he said.

Holiness unites, the pope said. "We know that the vocation to which we are all called is fulfilled first and foremost in charity, a gift of the Holy Spirit that unites us in Christ and to our brothers and sisters."

"The encounter with Jesus has this communal dimension," he said, as one's response to God's love represents "a dynamic of involvement and intercession." For example, St. Matthew, newly called by Jesus, invited his friends to encounter the Messiah, and St. Paul, after meeting the risen Christ, becomes the Apostle to the Gentiles.

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Holiness can also be domestic, he said. While the Holy Family of Nazareth is the preeminent example, there are many other examples of "holy married couples, in whom each of the spouses is an instrument for the sanctification of the other."

One "shining example," he said, is Blessed Józef and Wiktoria Ulma and their seven children: "all martyrs. They, too, remind us that 'sanctification is a communal journey, to be done two by two' and not alone. Always act with the community."

And finally, the pope said, holiness can be expressed through martyrdom, which still exists today. These are individuals or whole communities who heroically live out the Gospel with faith and charity, he added.

"Holiness gives life to the community," he said, thanking those present for their work promoting the causes of saints.

"You help us to understand and celebrate its reality and dynamics better and better, through the many and varied paths that you study and propose for our veneration; different paths, but all pointing to the same goal: the fullness of love. This is the path of holiness," he said.