

# Do I just not ‘want it’ enough to be a saint?

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**Q: I had heard someone use this quote, “There is only one reason you are not yet a saint: you do not want to be one.” I have to admit that I’ve been trying really hard to be holy. If I don’t feel holy does that mean I just don’t “want it” enough?**

A: Thank you so much for this question. It highlights a number of things that we need to clarify.

First, one thing I have learned over the course of my life (and especially during my life as a priest) is that two different people can hear the exact same thing in entirely different ways. I also had heard this quote a number of years ago, and my internal response was, “Yes! Let’s go!” I received it as a challenge that was convicting and inspiring. But I know that there are people who can hear this quote and feel condemned and defeated.

Where I might think, “Yes, these are some good areas in my life where I have not yet surrendered to Jesus ... let’s do that,” someone else thinks, “How much more can I do? I’ll never be able to do enough. I’ll never be enough.”

There is a danger in both perspectives. For the person who, like me, is inspired by the thought, they will need to slow down and make the right changes. They will also likely need to make sure that they are not merely “quick to start and quick to stop” but actually follow through on their decisions. For the person who might become discouraged, they will need to be reminded of all that they have already done to open themselves up to the Lord and his grace; simply because there is room for growth does not mean that they haven’t grown already.

The second thing to note is this: The person who said the quote is making an important distinction. They are pointing out that there is a difference between “wanting” and “willing.” We all “want” many things, but we do not always choose those things. We might desire to be healthier, but we are not necessarily willing to make the choices that need to be made in order to be healthier. We might wish that we were in a better relationship with certain family members or friends, but are not willing to make the decisions that would lead to a better relationship. The person who stated that we are not saints because we do not want to be saints is highlighting the fact that we might “wish” we were saints, but are we making the choices that would help us grow in holiness?

And this leads to the third piece. There are three things that each one of us can examine in our lives and discover if we are choosing holiness. First, we need to ask: Are there any things in my life that are incompatible with God’s will for my life? Have I become comfortable with sin or the neat occasions of sin as a regular part of my environment? If there are things in my life that are clearly harmful to my being able to love God and do his will, then I have to choose to get rid of them as much as I can.

Second, am I praying, fasting, and giving alms? This trifecta of the spiritual life is a very handy metric for assessing whether or not I am making time for God, allowing him into my daily life, and caring for others. If I am not praying, then there is no way possible for me to become holy. If those prayers do not translate into how I live my life (through self denial and self donation), then I might have “holy thoughts” during prayer but am not allowing God’s will to be lived in my daily life.

Third, am I participating in the sacramental life of the church? Do I go to confession regularly? Do I participate in the Mass as often as I can? If I remain distant from the sacraments, then I am not availing myself of the supernatural gifts that God has given to us.

Those three areas are going to be essential: actually making the choice for God, eliminating what is incompatible with God, and fostering my relationship with God.

And yet, none of those things make us holy. None of those things make us a saint.

God is the one who makes saints. See, the quote is true, but it doesn't tell the whole truth. Yes, we all need to choose God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength. But we are only changed by the grace of God that comes to us through Christ Jesus. Our prayer might be quiet and reflective (or active and inspiring), but real prayer is always a work of God's grace. Yes, we make ourselves available to God. Yes, we cooperate with God as much as we can. But God is the one who changes us.

One of the reasons why people can get so discouraged with their spiritual progress (or lack thereof) is because they mistakenly think that holiness is all on them. But God is the one who causes the growth. We are simply invited to show up and say yes.

The good news is: God wants you to be a great saint. He wants to give you absolutely everything you need to be holy. For your part, you simply need to show up and say yes.