

**Meditation on  
St. John Paul II  
and  
Habits to Grow  
Closer to God**

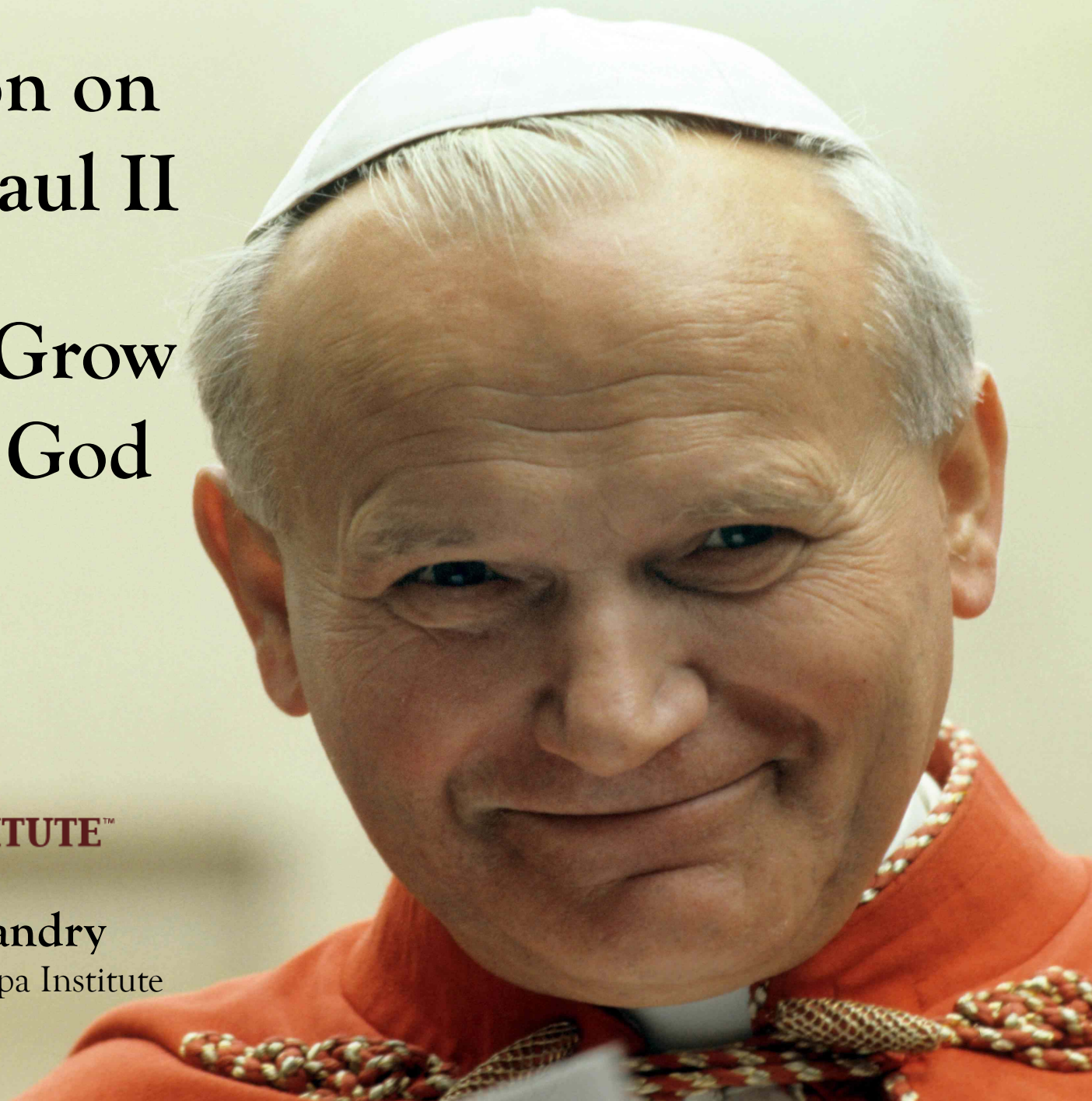


**NAPA INSTITUTE™**

**Fr. Roger J. Landry**

Retreat Talk for the Napa Institute

May 2020





## John Paul II's Principal Aim

- Universal Call to Holiness
- Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes* 22, 24)
  - Christ fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear.
  - Man cannot find himself except in the unselfish gift of himself to others.
- Canonized and beatified more people than all popes in the previous 500 years combined.
- Saints from all states of life

# What Is Holiness?

- Holiness is first a gift of God in Baptism, when we enter into God, who is holy, holy, holy.
- But it's a response on our part to God who tells us "Be holy, as I, the Lord your God, am holy."
- Holiness means:
  - To become like God as his image and likeness
  - Loving as God loves
  - Following, Imitating and Identifying with Jesus
  - Living according to the Holy Spirit





## The Urgency of Holiness

- “It is necessary to rediscover the full practical significance of ... the universal call to holiness: all the Christian faithful, of whatever state or rank, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.”
- “An urgent pastoral task.”
- “The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living.”
- “All pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness.”
- “A contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity.”



## The Need for Training in Holiness

- “The paths to holiness are personal and call for a genuine training in holiness adapted to people’s needs.
- Need a plan to grow closer to God. The spiritual life is way too important to wing.
- Jesus spoke about this training: “No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when *fully trained*, every disciple will be like his teacher.” (Lk 6:40)
- He urged the young St. Timothy, “Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” (1 Tim 4:7-8).



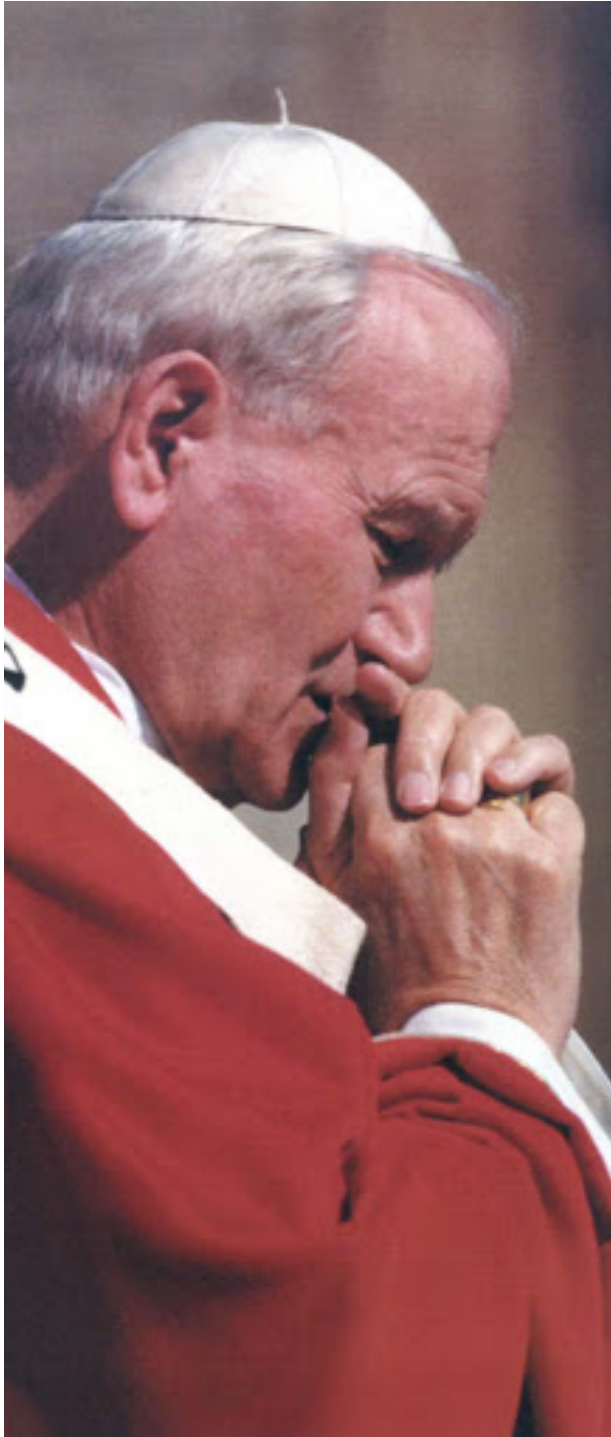
## Ten Pillars

- We will focus on ten pillars of holiness, ten different types of spiritual exercise to strengthen our soul.
- These are taken from John Paul II's beautiful 2001 exhortation *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, with his pastoral plan for the Third Christian Millennium.
- They are also taken from other documents and emphases in his pontificate.
- None should come as a big surprise, but *knowing* is not the same as *doing*.
- Jesus said, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (Jn 13:17).



# 1. Cooperation with Grace

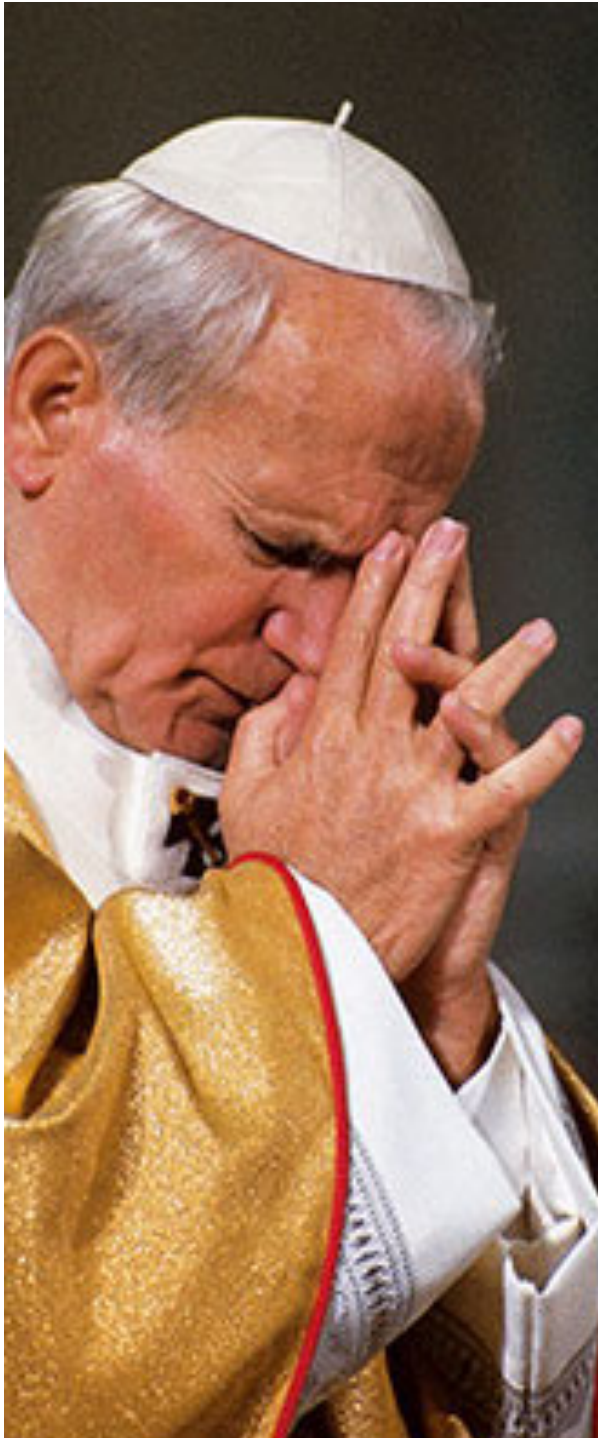
- “There is a temptation that perennially besets every spiritual journey and pastoral work: that of thinking that the results depend on our ability to act and to plan.”
- “God asks us really to cooperate with his grace.”
- “It’s fatal to forget that ‘without Christ we can do nothing’” (Jn 15:5).
- Holiness, St. Therese once quipped, is not our hiking up a 10,000 step staircase but God’s coming down in an elevator to seek to lift us up with our cooperation.
- This is life according to the Holy Spirit!



## 2. Prayer

- “Training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer.”
- “We have to learn to pray, as it were learning this art ever anew from the lips of the Divine Master himself, like the first disciples [who asked]: ‘Lord, teach us to pray!’” (Lk 11:1).
- “Prayer develops that conversation with Christ that makes us his intimate friends: ‘Abide in me and I in you’” (Jn 15:4). This reciprocity is the very substance and soul of the Christian life.”
- “Learning this Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully ... is the secret of a truly vital Christianity.”



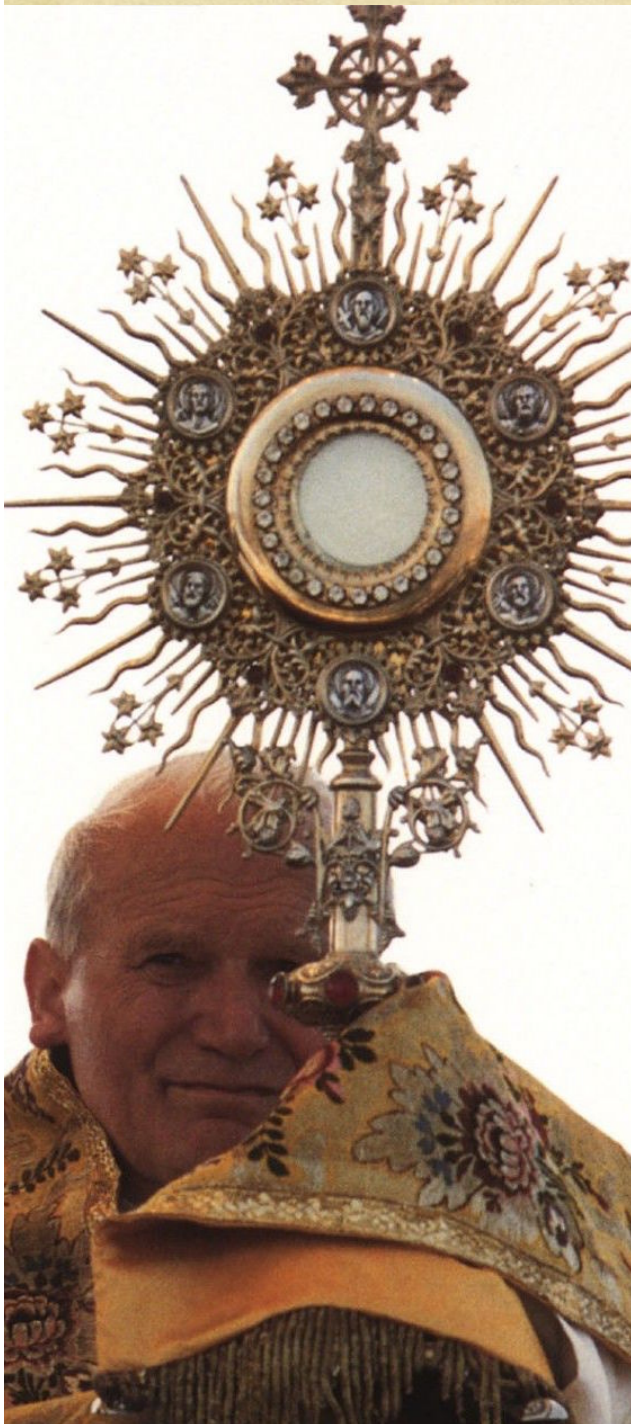


## 2. Prayer

- “It would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life.”
- “Especially in the face of the many trials to which today’s world subjects faith, they would not only be mediocre Christians, but Christians at risk ... of seeing their faith progressively undermined ... and [of] succumbing to the allure of substitutes.
- “It is essential that education in prayer should become in some way a key-point of all pastoral planning.”

### 3. The Holy Eucharist

- “It is obvious that our principal attention must be given to the liturgy,” which is the source and summit of the Church’s life.
- Entering into Holy Communion with Jesus is the greatest means in growth in holiness.
- “The Church draws her life from the Eucharist.”
- The importance of the Lord’s day.
- Growth in Eucharistic Amazement.
  - Eucharistic adoration
  - The privilege of daily Mass: “Give us today our supersubstantial (*epiousios*) bread!”
  - Spiritual communions





## 4. The Sacrament of Mercy

- “I am asking for renewed pastoral courage in ensuring that the day-to-day teaching of Christian communities persuasively and effectively presents the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.”
- Biggest problem facing the world is unexpiated guilt flowing from a loss of a sense of sin.
- The answer to this problem, he insisted, is Divine Mercy.
- We need to recognize our need for God’s mercy, come to receive it, and share it.
- He went to confession every week, heard confessions regularly, and forgave.



## 5. Listening to God's Word

- “There is no doubt that this primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed listening to the Word of God.”
- Most Catholics do not know the Bible well.
- It takes just 70-75 hours to read the entire Bible, or 12-15 minutes a day for a year.
- Not just for Bible *study* but *meditation* or *lectio divina* on God's word, which “questions, directs and shapes our lives.”
- The more we know God's word, the more God's thoughts become our thoughts, his words become our words, and his word can become flesh.

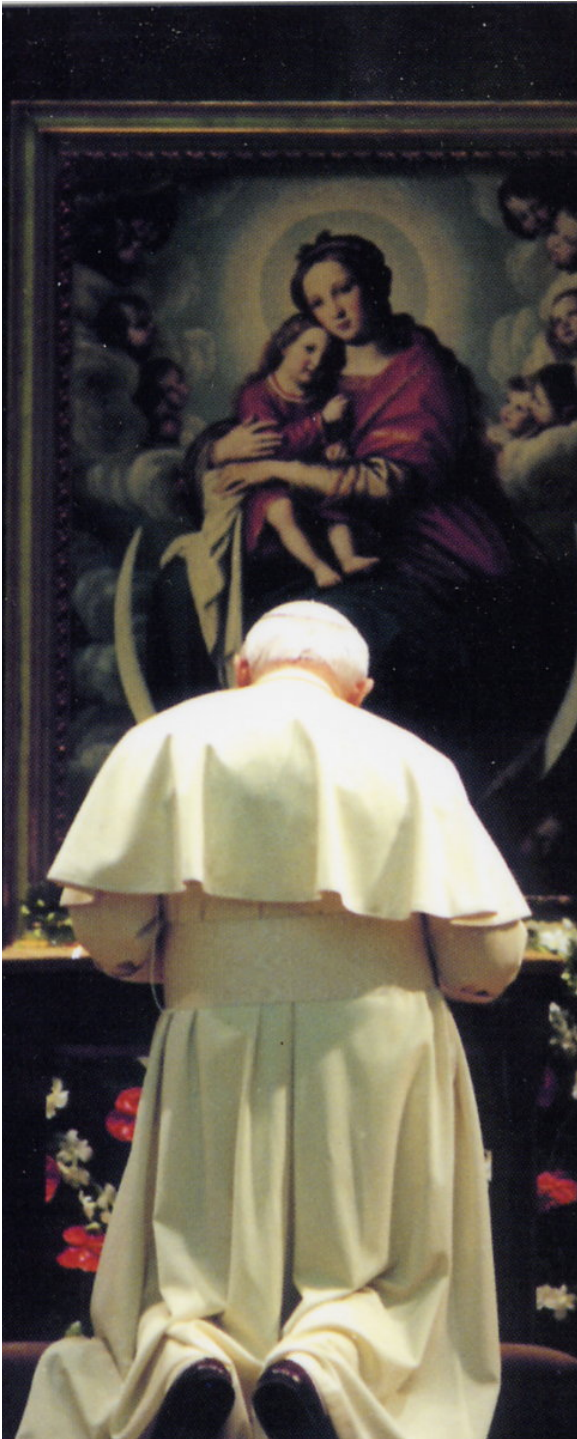


## 6. Proclaiming God's Word

- Once God has filled us with the “Words of Eternal Life,” once we have begun to feed on the “every word that comes from the mouth of God,” how can we keep it to ourselves?
- We begin to say with St. Paul, “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!,” and commit ourselves to going to proclaim the Good News to all people.
- This word is not just through “words” but also through “body language” or deeds.
- We hear the Word of God as words to be done and then with God's help set out to do it.
- The fruit of the Christian life, of holiness, is charity!

## 7. Marian Devotion

- John Paul II was consecrated to Mary. His papal motto was, “Totus Tuus,” from a prayer of St. Louis de Montfort: “I am all yours, O Mary, and all I have is yours. I accept you into everything I am and do. Give me your heart!”
- Constantly prayed, and urged us to pray, the Rosary.
- He beckoned us to “enter into the school of Mary.” The importance of consecration.
- We relate to her as fellow disciples, as sons and daughters, and as recipients of her prayers.
- Mary shows us what holiness is and how to live all of these pillars.





## 8. Family Life

- John Paul II is the “Pope of the Family.”
- His whole priesthood was trying to “introduce love into love.”
- The Sacrament of Marriage is modeled on the Trinity and on Christ’s love for the Church.
- “In God’s plan, all husbands and wives are called in marriage to holiness.”
- “An intimate community of life and love,” Christian marriage is meant to be a school of holiness, which “influences the holiness of large numbers of men and women.”
- The ultimate purpose of marriage and family, in good and bad times, poverty and prosperity, sickness and health, is *heaven!*



## 9. Work

- There is a “Gospel of Work,” which we see in the Book of Genesis, then modeled in the life of St. Joseph, and finally lived and preached by Jesus.
- Most of Jesus’ saving life was spent in manual labor as a *tekton* (builder).
- He preached constantly about scores of professions.
- “My Father is at work until now and so I am at work” (Jn 5:17).
  
- After the Fall, work is meant to be part of the redemption, helping us to love, serve and co-redeem.
  
- Through work we not only make *something* but make *ourselves*, for better or worse.
  
- Through work “like Abel,” we are sanctified.





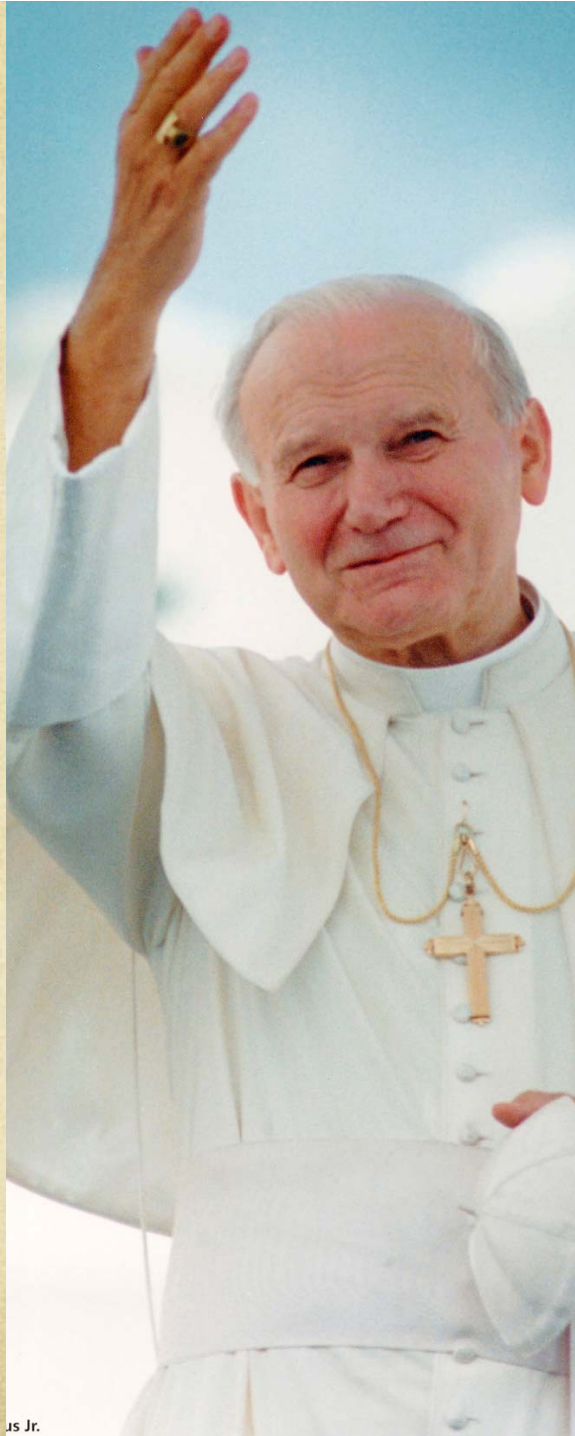
## 10. Suffering

- Part of life involves physical and other forms of suffering, which are a consequence of the Fall.
- John Paul II suffered much: the loss of his family quite young, the hardships under Nazism and Communism, the assassination attempt, his Parkinson's disease, and the “daily pressure of ... anxiety for the Churches.”
- He wrote that the purpose of suffering is to “unleash love in the human person.”
  - It gives people the opportunity to become Good Samaritans.
  - It helps those who are suffering to grow in humility and in gratitude for things that ordinarily might be taken for granted.



## Final Thoughts

- These ten spiritual exercises in the training of holiness John Paul II himself lived. They are a big part of the reason why he grew in holiness.
- They are all part of what Christ himself proclaimed and lived. He fully reveals this hope for divinized humanity to us, makes the supreme calling of holiness in ordinary life clear, and leads us on the path calling us to, and helping us, to give of ourselves to God and others in love.
- During this period of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's a chance for us to work on these pillars one at a time.
- As we approach his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, he is doubtless praying for us to embrace this call to the fullness of Christian life.



## Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of the life of Saint John Paul II and for all the graces you gave him as a disciple, son, priest, bishop and successor of St. Peter to help us not be afraid of opening the doors of our heart to Christ your Son.

We ask you, through his intercession, to help us to hunger and thirst for holiness, to rediscover the high standard of ordinary Christian living to which you call us, and to trust that you never call us to anything without giving us the means you know we need to achieve it.

Help us to make full use of these means of holiness so that we may come, like St. John Paul, to grow closer to you in this life and live forever with you in life eternal. And bless us, like you blessed him, with the ability to inspire others toward that same holy life.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.”

FOREWORD BY MATTHEW KELLY

# Plan of Life

HABITS  
TO HELP  
YOU GROW  
CLOSER  
TO GOD

ROGER J. LANDRY



## For More

If you would like more help on habits to help you grow closer to God, I would encourage you to read my 2018 book, *Plan of Life, Habits to Help You Grow Closer to God*, available through the Daughters of St. Paul (Pauline Books and Media) and via [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



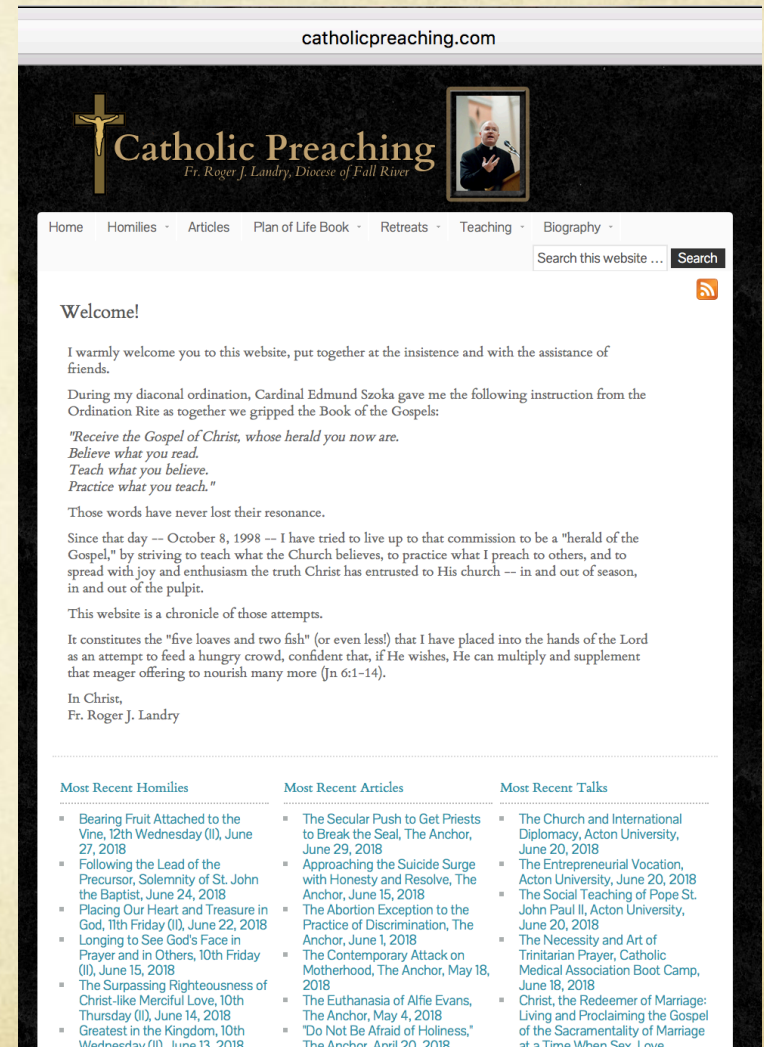
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The screenshot shows the homepage of the website [catholicpreaching.com](http://www.catholicpreaching.com). The header features the site's logo, which includes a cross and the text "Catholic Preaching" with a subtitle "Fr. Roger J. Landry, Diocese of Fall River". A navigation menu includes links for Home, Homilies, Articles, Plan of Life Book, Retreats, Teaching, and Biography. A search bar is located in the top right corner. The main content area begins with a "Welcome!" message from Fr. Roger J. Landry, followed by a paragraph of text and a quote from Cardinal Edmund Szoka. Below this, there are three columns of "Most Recent" content: Homilies, Articles, and Talks, each with a list of recent posts and their dates.

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Welcome!

I warmly welcome you to this website, put together at the insistence and with the assistance of friends.

During my diaconal ordination, Cardinal Edmund Szoka gave me the following instruction from the Ordination Rite as together we gripped the Book of the Gospels:

*"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are.  
Believe what you read.  
Teach what you believe.  
Practice what you teach."*

Those words have never lost their resonance.

Since that day -- October 8, 1998 -- I have tried to live up to that commission to be a "herald of the Gospel," by striving to teach what the Church believes, to practice what I preach to others, and to spread with joy and enthusiasm the truth Christ has entrusted to His church -- in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit.

This website is a chronicle of those attempts.

It constitutes the "five loaves and two fish" (or even less!) that I have placed into the hands of the Lord as an attempt to feed a hungry crowd, confident that, if He wishes, He can multiply and supplement that meager offering to nourish many more (Jn 6:1-14).

In Christ,  
Fr. Roger J. Landry

Most Recent Homilies

- Bearing Fruit Attached to the Vine, 12th Wednesday (II), June 27, 2018
- Following the Lead of the Precursor, Solemnity of St. John the Baptist, June 24, 2018
- Placing Our Heart and Treasure in God, 11th Friday (II), June 22, 2018
- Longing to See God's Face in Prayer and in Others, 10th Friday (II), June 15, 2018
- The Surpassing Righteousness of Christ-like Merciful Love, 10th Thursday (II), June 14, 2018
- Greatest in the Kingdom, 10th Wednesday (II), June 13, 2018

Most Recent Articles

- The Secular Push to Get Priests to Break the Seal, The Anchor, June 29, 2018
- Approaching the Suicide Surge with Honesty and Resolve, The Anchor, June 15, 2018
- The Abortion Exception to the Practice of Discrimination, The Anchor, June 1, 2018
- The Contemporary Attack on Motherhood, The Anchor, May 18, 2018
- The Euthanasia of Alfie Evans, The Anchor, May 4, 2018
- "Do Not Be Afraid of Holiness," The Anchor, April 20, 2018

Most Recent Talks

- The Church and International Diplomacy, Acton University, June 20, 2018
- The Entrepreneurial Vocation, Acton University, June 20, 2018
- The Social Teaching of Pope St. John Paul II, Acton University, June 20, 2018
- The Necessity and Art of Trinitarian Prayer, Catholic Medical Association Boot Camp, June 18, 2018
- Christ, the Redeemer of Marriage: Living and Proclaiming the Gospel of the Sacramentality of Marriage at a Time When Sex Love,

St. John Paul II

*Pray for us!*



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