

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

As many of you know my name is Father Danny Santos, the Danny part is easy – we have heard Danny boy many times. But Santos for some of you may not be so familiar. For one, it's Portuguese and those from Latin Countries would know it translated roughly Saints. So I'm Danny Saints. My last name allowed my mother to come up with a very creative smack down. You see, my younger brother Anthony and I would fight often and whenever we did my mom would exclaim with disgust – 'you two are just saints by your name!'

Yes, there have been many occasions where I have been a saint just by my name but I know God is calling us to more than just to be a saint by our name – we are called to be saints.

Leon Bloy once wrote, "The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint." Why? Because to be anything less than holy is to remain unfinished.

Let me offer an illustration: Suppose you went out and bought a flower pot containing one daffodil bulb buried in rich soil. You take the pot, put it in a closet, and for the next two weeks

feed the bulb nothing but Coca-Cola. This is a sad thought, but why is it sad? Isn't it because the potential for this bulb to become a beautiful daffodil was unfinished? To put it less formally, that it didn't become what it could have become? So, too, it is with us we are called to be Saints anything less is tragic.

How do we become saints or another way to ask this is how do we become holy because you and I have the potential for saintly, for holiness, which is, simply stated, the full flowering or blooming of our personality. Many people believe, if only subtly, that to be holy is to be stifled, less free, less themselves. They think its hell all the way to heaven and heaven all the way to hell. But this is not the case.

Just as the Harvest Principle provides for our reflection – we reap, what we sow; if we want to be saints; if we want to be holy we have to sow seeds of holiness. In other words, of good character.

Someone of good character can be simply defined as a person who is saintly. In other words, it is someone who is living out the two greatest commandments we heard in today's Gospel - to love God above all things

and people; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Church provides us the wisdom to help us to learn these two commandments and how to live them out and we call these virtues.

Often in our culture we hear about values, a company has values, as Catholic Christians we have virtues. There are a number of virtues but I want to focus on seven of them. Seven virtues in particular, why? Because the one stumbling block to holiness is sin. Sin literally means to miss the mark, like an archer with a bow and arrow missing the bullseye and that's what the seven deadly sins do. They twist or corrupt the virtues God has created and make it miss the mark-sainthood. They are the root of every sin we can commit- it reduces our potential and doesn't allow us to become what we are called to be.

If we want overcome these deadly sins, we must learn about the virtues that counteract them and call upon God's aid to help us in our daily struggle to adopt them into our lives.

One of the central keys to overcoming sin is "deliberate acts" of virtue, where we are intentional about the habit that we want to cultivate. If we want to stop gossiping about someone, we must instead choose to

speak charitably about them. If food is a problem in our lives, we deliberately practice temperance and regulate our food intake.

Whatever bad habit or vice we want to end, we need to put a virtue in its place.

The seven deadly sins with the corresponding heavenly virtue are: to counteract

*Pride – we need Humility*

*Greed – we need Generosity*

*Lust – we need Chastity*

*Anger – we need Meekness*

*Gluttony – we need Temperance*

*Envy – we need Kindness*

*Sloth – we need Diligence or persistence*

By working on these virtues deliberately, by creating good habits we become a person of good character. We become saintly in our life. But like anything in life this is not easy. However, God has given us a gift to help us with this – it's called practice.

We can practice these virtues - and like anything we have to start small. It's kind of like working out at the gym – if we want to bench press 100 lbs. we better start smaller and get our

muscles to the capacity to be able to lift that much weight. Our habits help to build our character and in the same way as the exercise example, if we start with really big deliberate acts we may do spiritual damage to ourselves. The better answer to this problem is to start small — to sow small deliberate acts with great love.

For example, if I struggle with gluttony for food – to fast 24 hours for one month would be way too intense but I can choose to avoid snacking on occasion, or eat a smaller portion for dinner. By working on these little practices I grow in virtue as these good habits build my character.

Another example is pride, in particular impatience; to overcome that by calling or speaking to someone who annoys us and knows how to push our buttons daily make not be a good start. But we can test our patience gently by learning to wait in line at the grocery store, by not honking our horn in traffic or rushing out of the parking lot. These little opportunities will help us to fortify our patience so when we come to those difficult moments we will find strength, resilience and peace.

We can reflect on many more examples but the result will lead us to the same conclusion that practice makes perfect, character helps us to become saints and whatever practice we choose to adopt it is a call to live out the two greatest commandments by loving God in all we say, in all we do and in all with think; and to love our neighbor as our very self. So let us be saints for God, ones of good character who have mastered the virtues by our little practices. We reap, what we sow – let us sow virtue so we can reap good character.