

## STUDY PAPER TWO

### WHAT DOES HOLINESS MEAN TODAY?

Father Joseph Delargy, Abbot, Mount St Bernard Abbey

*All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity. All are called to holiness: "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5 v 48): Vatican II Lumen Gentium 40:2*

In the world at large the image of holiness has changed during the last few decades. It could be said that no longer do the majority of the population look to spiritual leaders for moral guidance and inspiration but look elsewhere.

People like Bob Geldoff, Princess Diana, Bono, Nelson Mandela, etc, have done great good to change the world but would not figure in any list of pious people. To a big part of the population it is these people who are the modern day "saints".

The phenomenal attention drawn to the Passion at Easter 2004 was not by any statement of a Church leader but by the film *The Passion of the Christ* by the film actor and producer Mel Gibson. This should make us, as Christians, think; also we have to bear in mind that recent scandalous behaviour by some Church representatives hasn't helped people in forming an image of Christian holiness. People rightly question what and where is holiness today; who is holy? As Christians we know holiness is more than philanthropy, it is not just a question of our relationship with our fellow men and women but also our relationship with God that makes one holy, we need both, both are essential.

Today, people stress helping others as a sign of holiness, and rightly so, but it can be forgotten that holiness also involves our relationship with God.

Questions for reflection:

1. As Christians, are we failing to give a positive, wholesome example of holiness?
2. "The Spirit blows wherever it pleases" (John 3 v 8). As Christians, what is our attitude to those who do great good in the world without having any formal allegiance to a Christian Church?
3. Can we recognise holiness in the followers of other faiths or is what we see in the life of, for example, the Dali Lama something different?
4. How is a person's relationship with God visible to others if not through their relationship with other people?