Columns
Spirituality



Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican as he leads, for the first time, the midday recitation of the "Regina Coeli" prayer May 11, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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When I heard of Pope Francis' death, I teared up, and as I read his Easter message, I thought, "Here was a holy person." As I said that, I remembered a paper I wrote for a theology class as a postulant, the first year of entering religious life, that focused on what *holy* meant. The word *holy* derives from words that mean "being whole."

Today, much is written about an emerging consciousness that first sees from wholeness. Instead of first seeing everything as separate and trying to figure out how things do or do not connect, it sees the relationships and interconnections before analyzing the separate parts. It is a whole new way of seeing reality and one's life.

I believe and hope that our newly elected Pope Leo XIV is this kind of holy/whole person.

Being holy/whole does not imply timidity or acquiescence. It is strong and conveys a sense of knowing who one is.

Being holy/whole requires one to have done their inner work, to become aware of what triggers one's unhealthy self so as not to react to people and positions out of one's needs, but rather to respond from one's heart, from the place of Divine indwelling. It is to be courageous enough to be humble, to admit mistakes, and seek counsel. It is to be secure enough to be forgiving and offer mercy.

Being holy/whole means widening one's embrace of truth and tradition. It is seeing that change can open one up to seeing a much larger vision of the Gospel. It is understanding that one's experience is critical to one's overall development and sees experience as transformative.

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Such transformative experiences enable understanding that those who are different and too often excluded from the church are the very people that Jesus welcomed throughout his life. Such transformative experiences can call into question the absolutism of some of our moral teachings, especially when faced with the suffering or exclusion of others.

Being holy/whole means believing in the broadest vision of how universal the church really is. It recognizes that the message of the Gospel moves beyond the individual and the church community into the wider suffering world — beyond the human, to include all creatures and the whole planet as our Earth home, worthy of respect and care.

Being holy/whole means understanding the role of a moral leader in the global community: to advocate for every life as precious in a world increasingly prone to violence; to speak out when human rights are violated and when hatred and contempt are stirred up toward the vulnerable, the marginalized, and especially toward those seeking a new homeland; to challenge the unequal distribution of wealth at all levels, which prevents millions of women, men, and children from achieving their basic human needs.

It means recognizing and condemning domestic and sexual violence, where rage is too often directed at women and children. It means being able to imagine new possibilities for peace and nonviolence: to hold the many global conflicts with open hands — acknowledging the multiple sides yet calling us to see the unjust suffering and destruction they cause.

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It means understanding that every person is a child of God. We are all equal. We are all interconnected.

Being holy/whole means understanding that one's way of doing things is not the only right way. Today, in a polarized world and church, dialogue must be fostered at every level of exchange, and so continuing to develop a synodal church is important.

This requires both attention to one's inner development and the practical skills of dialogue. It requires an authentic acknowledgement of each person's moral agency and respect for each person's ideas and positions. It believes that after everyone — regardless of position, gender or worldview — offers their best options, something new can emerge as we continue together to imagine other possibilities to what is needed in any specific situation.

Being holy/whole demands a faith deeply rooted in the experience of the Divine. One's faith has to be experiential, to be alive, integrating the insights of science, cosmology and psychology with the wisdom of our faith tradition, breathing new life into our credal belief statements. This will help make the Gospel message alive once again to all generations, especially the young.

Jesus embodied holiness/wholeness and invited us to come follow him. As we are getting to know Leo XIV, I see many of these qualities alive in him and the potential to cultivate many of the others. May he continue to relinquish the trappings of power and privilege, so like Jesus we will only need to see the choices he makes — how to live, how to serve, how to lead — to want to follow and help make the Gospel come alive in our world.

May Leo XIV continue to be a holy/whole person.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. View the full series.