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At the Sacristy Door

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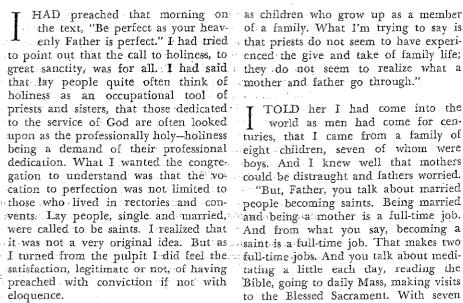
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At the Sacristy Door

bu KILIAN McDONNELL, O.S.B.



After unvesting and after I had made my thanksgiving, I left by the sacristy door. Waiting outside was a young mother with her three young children. Actually they were three of her seven children. The mother held the youngest, whom I learned was called Suzy. I recognized Suzy immediately. Last St. Blaise's day her mother had brought her to the rail to have her throat blessed. Most children of three years either cried or looked at you with that inimitable: combination of wonder and terror. But Suzy flashed her great blue eyes and smiled from ear to ear. My priestly decorum was shattered for the next ten throats. Yes, I remembered Suzy.

The mother spoke, "Father, I liked your sermon, but . . . well . . . I don't know how to say what is in my mind. without seeming to be bold."

I assured her she could speak freely and I would not take it amiss.

"Well, it seems to me that you, and priests in general, do not understand what married life entails. Pardon me if this sounds fresh, but I often think that priests must spring full grown from the minds of their bishops, that they do not come into the world as the rest of us do,

the text, "Be perfect as your heav- of a family. What I'm trying to say is enly Father is perfect." I had tried that priests do not seem to have experi-

> TOLD her I had come into the world as men had come for centuries, that I came from a family of eight children, seven of whom were boys, And I knew well that mothers could be distraught and fathers worried.

> "But, Father, you talk about married people becoming saints. Being married and being a mother is a full-time job. And from what you say, becoming a saint is a full-time job. That makes two full-time jobs. And you talk about meditating a little each day, reading the Bible, going to daily Mass, making visits to the Blessed Sacrament. With seven children to take care of, I scarcely have time to grab a bite to eat in the morning. I get four of the children off to school. Then I'm on the go almost constantly. By midafternoon my nerves are frayed. Then at four o'clock the four children who go to school descend upon me with all their pent-up energy. By eight o'clock I am too tired to move, too tired even to talk with my husband.

'I began to see that I had preached

a poor sermon.

"I can understand your difficulty," I began somewhat lamely "I think you know that there are not different kinds of holiness, a special kind of holiness for priests and sisters, and a watereddown, secondhand kind for lay people. No, there are not different kinds of holiness. But there are different ways of attaining holiness. Each of us knows his or her way from the particular vocation God has given us. I attain holiness in a priestly way: by my daily Mass, my breviary, hearing confessions, visiting the people in their homes, typing out the parish bulletin. My vocation is my way of attaining holiness."
I continued, "You attain the same

holiness in a different way. You are a

wife and a mother. You will attain he ness as a wife and mother by washi dishes, ironing clothes, correcting t children; by, at times, getting so tir you can't think. You become holy accepting what you cannot change the state of perpetual bedlam that sev healthy vigorous children are constant creating. You become holy by bei faithful to your conjugal obligations.

"You mentioned that your work" home and acquiring holiness are bo full-time jobs. That is certainly corre But they are really one job, not to jobs. I attain holiness by being a go priest. You attain holiness by being good wife and mother. A poor hou keeper and a grudging, nagging w could never attain perfection. In sho your vocation as a wife and mother your way to holiness."

CHE thought a moment and objecte But what about daily Mass, ar reading the Bible, and all the oth spiritual exercises you mentioned your sermon?"

"Don't forget," I answered, "you of also become holy by not going to Ma on week days. From what you say, it impossible for you to get to Mass dy ing the week. Since that is the case, yo accept it as God's will. Ultimately it doing God's will that makes us holy. 🍱 to sanctify your day with small snatch of prayer, just as you must snatch a 🗓 to eat if you are going to get any brea fast. If you plan carefully, you can in two or three minutes of spiriting reading and some family prayers. your family grows up you will have more time for spiritual exercises. Until the be patient and do the best you can,

Suzy tugged at her mother's dress and the other two children were getting in patient. The mother thanked me and was off down the street. As I walk toward the rectory I marveled at wondrously simple way God leads us a Himself. We, priest and lay people, all the ones who complicate holiness, as complicate so many things.