



# Hidden Holiness

*Michael Plekon*

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In *Hidden Holiness*, Michael Plekon challenges us to examine the concept of holiness. He argues that both Orthodox and Catholic churches understand saints to be individuals whose lives and deeds are unusual, extraordinary, or miraculous. Such a requirement for sainthood undermines, in his view, one of the basic messages of Christianity: that all people are called to holiness.

Instead of focusing on the ecclesiastical process of recognizing saints, Plekon explores a more ordinary and less noticeable "hidden" holiness, one founded on the calling of all to be prophets and priests and witnesses to the Gospel. As Rowan Williams has insisted, people of faith need to find God's work in *their* culture and daily lives. With that in mind, Plekon identifies a fascinatingly diverse group of faithful who exemplify an everyday sanctity, as well as the tools they have used to enact their faith.

Plekon calls upon contemporary writers—among them, Rowan Williams, Kathleen Norris, Sara Miles, Simone Weil, and Darcey Steinke—as well as such remarkable and controversial figures as Mother Teresa, Thomas Merton, and Dorothy Day—to demonstrate ways to imagine a more diverse and everyday holiness. He also introduces four individuals of "hidden holiness": a Yup'ik Alaskan, Olga Arsumquak Michael; the artist Joanna Reitlinger; the lay theologian Elisabeth Behr-Sigel; and human rights activist Paul Anderson. A generous and expansive treatment of the holy life, accessibly written for all readers, Plekon's book is sure to inspire us to recognize and celebrate the holiness hidden in the ordinary lives of those around us.

"There is a widespread idea that holiness, if it exists at all, is something that happened in the long-ago past. This book is evidence to the contrary. It contains stories of holiness, typically hidden, in the midst of modern times. Some will find in these stories confirmation of their faith, all may read the stories as moving accounts of human drama." —**Peter L. Berger, emeritus University Professor, Boston University and Institute of Religion and World Affairs**

"Father Michael Plekon pushes a boundary here. Our usual understanding of those who are saints involves something heroic, something extraordinary—and it allows us to put too comfortable a distance between ourselves and those we consider saints. We are able to look away from the Lord's demand that we are to be holy, as God is. By focusing on the manifest holiness of a number of people who did not demonstrate such extraordinary heroism, people whose lives nevertheless give witness to the transforming power of the gospel, he challenges all of us to become what our baptism calls us to be." —**John Garvey, author of *Seeds of the Word: Orthodox Thinking on Other Religions***

"In *Hidden Holiness*, Michael Plekon writes about the ways holiness and grace are everywhere, not just located inside church buildings. He writes of people living out their faith. I loved this book and recommend it to anyone who wants a relationship with divinity that is creative and on-going, a religion deeply embodied unconfined by doctrine and rules." —**Darcey Steinke, author of *Easter Everywhere: A Memoir and Jesus Saves***

"Recent years have seen a great resurgence of interest in the saints—not as legendary heroes or heavenly patrons, but as spiritual companions and models of faithfulness. Michael Plekon writes with compassion and insight about a number of those models. But his great contribution is to highlight a new style of holiness, hidden in the ordinary duties and challenges of everyday life. A profound, ecumenically rich, reflection on

the meaning of sainthood in our time.” —**Robert Ellsberg, author, *All Saints***

“What impresses me most about *Hidden Holiness* is its humane Christian vision. Fr. Plekon is a wonderful story-teller, retelling the lives of the saints with exceptional verve and clarity. Vividly, he conveys the diversity and individuality of the saints he considers; far from exhibiting cookie-cutter perfection, Fr. Plekon’s saints seem to embody particular concrete ideas in the mind of God, and to work out their salvation in the most unpromising conditions. This is just what we need to know about holiness, lest the idea come to seem fusty and irrelevant.” —**Carol Zaleski, Smith College**

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