

## **GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE – MARCH 19, 2018**

### **ON THE CALL TO HOLINESS IN TODAY'S WORLD**

#### **CHAPTER ONE – The Call to Holiness**

##### **THE LORD CALLS**

10. ... Yet with this Exhortation I would like to insist primarily on the call to holiness that the Lord addresses to each of us, the call that he also addresses, personally, to you: “Be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44; cf. 1 Pet 1:16). The Second Vatican Council stated this clearly: “Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord — each in his or her own way — to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect.”<sup>10</sup>

11. “Each in his or her own way” the Council says. We should not grow discouraged before examples of holiness that appear unattainable. There are some testimonies that may prove helpful and inspiring, but that we are not meant to copy, for that could even lead us astray from the one specific path that the Lord has in mind for us. The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts (cf. 1 Cor 12:7), rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them. We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, when the great mystic, Saint John of the Cross, wrote his Spiritual Canticle, he preferred to avoid hard and fast rules for all. He explained that his verses were composed so that everyone could benefit from them “in his or her own way.”<sup>12</sup> For God’s life is communicated “to some in one way and to others in another.”<sup>13</sup>

##### **FOR YOU TOO**

14. ... We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by laboring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain.<sup>14</sup>

15. Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to him in every situation. Do not be dismayed, for you can do this in the power of the Holy Spirit, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (cf. Gal 5:22–23). When you feel the temptation to dwell on your own weakness, raise your eyes to Christ crucified and say: “Lord, I am a poor sinner, but you can work the miracle of making me a

little bit better.” In the Church, holy yet made up of sinners, you will find everything you need to grow towards holiness. The Lord has bestowed on the Church the gifts of Scripture, the sacraments, holy places, living communities, the witness of the saints and a multifaceted beauty that proceeds from God’s love, “like a bride bedecked with jewels” (Is 61:10).

16. This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures. Here is an example: a woman goes shopping, she meets a neighbor and they begin to speak, and the gossip starts. But she says in her heart: “No, I will not speak badly of anyone.” This is a step forward in holiness. Later, at home, one of her children wants to talk to her about his hopes and dreams, and even though she is tired, she sits down and listens with patience and love. That is another sacrifice that brings holiness. Later she experiences some anxiety, but recalling the love of the Virgin Mary, she takes her rosary and prays with faith. Yet another path of holiness. Later still, she goes out onto the street, encounters a poor person and stops to say a kind word to him. One more step.

### **YOUR MISSION IN CHRIST**

21. The Father’s plan is Christ, and ourselves in him. In the end, it is Christ who loves in us, for “holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full.”<sup>24</sup> As a result, “the measure of our holiness stems from the stature that Christ achieves in us, to the extent that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life on his.”<sup>25</sup> Every saint is a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people.

### **ACTIVITY THAT SANCTIFIES**

26. It is not healthy to love silence while fleeing interaction with others, to want peace and quiet while avoiding activity, to seek prayer while disdaining service. Everything can be accepted and integrated into our life in this world, and become a part of our path to holiness. We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission.

Francis, Pope. *Gaudete et Exsultate: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World* (pp. 12-19).  
Our Sunday Visitor. Kindle Edition.

### **FOOTNOTES**

10 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

11 Cf. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, “Theology and Holiness,” in *Communio* 14/4 (1987), 345.

12 *Spiritual Canticle*, Red. B, Prologue, 2.

13 Cf. *ibid.*, 14–15, 2.

14 Cf. Catechesis, General Audience of 19 November 2014: *Insegnamenti* II/2 (2014), 555.

24 Benedict XVI, Catechesis, General Audience of 13 April 2011: *Insegnamenti* VII (2011), 451.

25 *ibid.*, 450.

## CHAPTER TWO – Enemies of Holiness

### A DOCTRINE WITHOUT MYSTERY

40. Gnosticism is one of the most sinister ideologies because, while unduly exalting knowledge or a specific experience, it considers its own vision of reality to be perfect. Thus, perhaps without even realizing it, this ideology feeds on itself and becomes even more myopic. It can become all the more illusory when it masks itself as a disembodied spirituality. For gnosticism “by its very nature seeks to domesticate the mystery,”<sup>38</sup> whether the mystery of God and his grace, or the mystery of others’ lives.

41. When somebody has an answer for every question, it is a sign that they are not on the right road. They may well be false prophets, who use religion for their own purposes, to promote their own psychological or intellectual theories. God infinitely transcends us; he is full of surprises. We are not the ones to determine when and how we will encounter him; the exact times and places of that encounter are not up to us. Someone who wants everything to be clear and sure presumes to control God’s transcendence.

42. Nor can we claim to say where God is not, because God is mysteriously present in the life of every person, in a way that he himself chooses, and we cannot exclude this by our presumed certainties. Even when someone’s life appears completely wrecked, even when we see it devastated by vices or addictions, God is present there. If we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit rather than our own preconceptions, we can and must try to find the Lord in every human life. This is part of the mystery that a gnostic mentality cannot accept, since it is beyond its control.

### NEW PELAGIANS

57. Still, some Christians insist on taking another path, that of justification by their own efforts, the worship of the human will and their own abilities. The result is a self-centered and elitist complacency, bereft of true love. This finds expression in a variety of apparently unconnected ways of thinking and acting: an obsession with the law, an absorption with social and political advantages, a punctilious concern for the Church’s liturgy, doctrine and prestige, a vanity about the ability to manage practical matters, and an excessive concern with programs of self-help and personal fulfilment. Some Christians spend their time and energy on these things, rather than letting themselves be led by the Spirit in the way of love, rather than being passionate about communicating the beauty and the joy of the Gospel and seeking out the lost among the immense crowds that thirst for Christ.<sup>63</sup>

Francis, Pope. *Gaudete et Exultate: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World* (pp. 25-26 and 32-33). Our Sunday Visitor. Kindle Edition.

38 Cf. Letter to the Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina for the Centenary of the Founding of the Faculty of Theology (3 March 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 9–10 March 2015, p. 6.

63 Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 95: AAS 105 (2013), 1060.

### CHAPTER THREE – In Light of the Master

63. There can be any number of theories about what constitutes holiness, with various explanations and distinctions. Such reflection may be useful, but nothing is more enlightening than turning to Jesus' words and seeing his way of teaching the truth. Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23). The Beatitudes are like a Christian's identity card. So if anyone asks: "What must one do to be a good Christian?", the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>66</sup> In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives.

Francis, Pope. *Gaudete et Exsultate: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World* (p. 37).  
Our Sunday Visitor. Kindle Edition.

66 Cf. Homily at Mass in Casa Santa Marta, 9 June 2014: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 June 2014, p. 8.

### CHAPTER FOUR – Signs of Holiness in Today's World

144. Let us not forget that Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details.  
The little detail that wine was running out at a party.  
The little detail that one sheep was missing.  
The little detail of noticing the widow who offered her two small coins.  
The little detail of having spare oil for the lamps, should the bridegroom delay.  
The little detail of asking the disciples how many loaves of bread they had.  
The little detail of having a fire burning and a fish cooking as he waited for the disciples at daybreak.

Francis, Pope. *Gaudete et Exsultate: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World* (p. 71).  
Our Sunday Visitor. Kindle Edition.

### CHAPTER FIVE – Spiritual Combat

#### An urgent need

167. The gift of discernment has become all the more necessary today, since contemporary life offers immense possibilities for action and distraction, and the world presents all of them as valid and good. All of us, but especially the young, are immersed in a culture of zapping. We can navigate simultaneously on two or more screens and interact at the same time with two or three virtual scenarios. Without the wisdom of discernment, we can easily become prey to every passing trend.

Francis, Pope. *Gaudete et Exsultate: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World* (p. 83).  
Our Sunday Visitor. Kindle Edition.

**THE DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH - THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL**  
**CHAPTER V**  
**THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS IN THE CHURCH**

**40. ... Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history.**

**41. The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity.**

## **Top Five Takeaways from ‘Gaudete et Exsultate’**

**James Martin, S.J.**

**April 09, 2018**

**“Rejoice and be glad!” is what Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount. It’s also the title of Pope Francis’ new apostolic exhortation on holiness in everyday life. Why should we “rejoice and be glad”? Because God, as Francis reminds us, calls us all to be saints. But how can we respond to that call?**

**Well, here are five takeaways from Francis’ new and very practical exhortation.**

### **1. Holiness means being yourself**

**Pope Francis offers us many examples of holy lives throughout this document: St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the French Carmelite who found holiness in doing small tasks; St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Jesuit founder who sought to find God in all things; St. Philip Neri, the founder of the Oratorians who was renowned for his sense of humor.**

**The saints pray for us and give us examples of how to live, but we are not meant to be cookie-cutter versions of them. We are meant to be ourselves, and each believer is meant to “discern his or her own path” and “bring out the very best of themselves.” As Thomas Merton said, “For me to be a saint means to be myself.”**

### **2. Everyday life can lead to holiness**

**You do not need to be a bishop, a priest or a member of a religious order to be holy. Everyone is called to be a saint, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us—a mother or a father, a student or an attorney, a teacher or a janitor. “Saints next door,” Francis calls them. All we need to do is to “live our lives in love” and “bear witness” to God in all we do.**

**That also doesn’t have to mean big, dramatic actions. Francis offers examples of everyday sanctity, like a loving parent raising a child; as well as “small gestures” and sacrifices that one can make, like deciding not to pass on gossip. If you can see your own life as a “mission,” then you soon realize that you can simply be loving and kind to move towards holiness.**

**You also do not have to be “swooning in mystic rapture” to be a saint or walking around with “lowered eyes.” Nor do you have to withdraw from other people. On the other hand, you do not want to be caught up in the “rat race” of rushing from one thing to another. A balance between action and contemplation is essential.**

### **3. Two tendencies to avoid: Gnosticism and Pelagianism**

**Pope Francis may send people racing to either dictionaries or their theology textbooks when asks us to avoid two dangers in the spiritual life.**

**The first is Gnosticism, from the Greek word gnosis, to know. Gnosticism is the old heresy that says that what matters most is what you know. No need to be charitable or do good**

works. All you need is the correct intellectual approach. Today Gnosticism tempts people to think that they can make the faith “entirely comprehensible” and leads them to want to force others to adopt their way of thinking. “When somebody has an answer for every question,” says Francis, “it’s a sign that they are not on the right path.” In other words, being a know-it-all is not going to save you.

The second thing to avoid is Pelagianism, named for Pelagius, the fifth-century theologian associated with this idea. Pelagianism says that we can take care of our salvation through our own efforts. Pelagians trust in their own powers, don’t feel like they need God’s grace and act superior to others because they observe certain rules.

Today’s Pelagians often have, the pope says, “an obsession with the law, an absorption with social and political advantages, punctilious concern for the church’s liturgy, doctrine and prestige.” It’s a real danger to holiness because it robs us of humility, sets us over others, and leaves little room for grace.

#### **4. Be kind**

“Gaudete et Exsultate” is filled with Pope Francis’ trademark practical advice for living a life of holiness. For example, don’t gossip, stop judging and, most important, stop being cruel.

That goes for online actions, too. Francis’ comments on this topic are memorable. Online, he writes, “defamation and slander can become commonplace...since things can be said there that would be unacceptable in public discourse, as people look to compensate for their own discontent by lashing out at others.... In claiming to uphold other commandments, they completely ignore the eighth, which forbids bearing false witness or lying and ruthlessly vilifying others.”

To be holy, be kind.

#### **5. The Beatitudes are a roadmap for holiness**

As you might guess from the document’s title, the Beatitudes, Jesus’ list of “blessed ones,” are central to this exhortation. The Beatitudes are not only what Jesus means by holiness, they are also a portrait of our Lord himself. So we’re called to be poor in spirit, meek, peacemakers, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on.

But let me focus on one beatitude: “Blessed are the merciful.” Pope Francis says mercy, one of the central themes of his papacy, has two aspects: helping and serving others but also forgiving and understanding. Jesus does not say, “Blessed are those who plot revenge!”

And what is Pope Francis’ overall summary of holiness? It’s based on the Beatitudes: “Seeing and acting with mercy.”