

January 17, 2021 John 1:35-42

Pope Francis wrote an APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION titled

EVANGELII GAUDIUM The joy of the gospel

In it Pope Francis begins;

“The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.”

That last line should be particularly important to us as we start this New Year. Listen again!

In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.”

It's almost prophetic.

My friends we're about to embark on a new chapter in our faith lives.

2021 has just begun and already there are a lot of folks predicting doom and gloom in our future as faithful Christians. It doesn't have to be that way.

If we take the pope's words to heart we will find joy in our lives, but we have to be willing to awaken to what the Gospel is teaching us.

Years ago, before the Holy Spirit opened my mind and my heart to the beauty of our faith, I used to love to read fiction books, more specifically science fiction fantasy books. I loved that when I was reading these books my thoughts drifted off to unrealistic worlds where troubles belong to others and the heroes always win in the end.

As I was reading about Samuel in our Old Testament reading today it brought to mind a scene from one of my favorite series of books. It's a scene where a Duke is moving his family and his people to another

location and he's telling his son that this move will be difficult but that he shouldn't be afraid of unknown experiences.

I love these lines from the book; "A person needs new experiences. It jars something deep inside, allowing them to grow. Without change something sleeps inside us, and seldom awakens. The sleeper must awaken."

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If we close our eyes when we are awake as we do in sleep then we will not awaken to the reality that surrounds us. We will continue to sleep in our own little world hoping that whatever happens out there will not affect what happens in here and here.

To a certain extent we can control what happens in here. Not so much with what happens out there.

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In the Old Testament reading Samuel was still very young and didn't realize that it was God calling him in his sleep. It was Eli that finally understood who it was that awakened Samuel from his sleep.

Eli was a man inspired by God as was John the Baptist. Both men were spiritually awake in order to direct others towards God.

Doesn't God call all his children for that single-mindedness and at the same time give us the free will to follow His will or not?

In our baptism rite, after the water is poured on the head of each one of us there is an anointing with the Holy Chrism Oil. This anointing proclaims each one of us as priest, prophet, and king. In this role we are called to proclaim the Kingdom of God to others. Because most of us are infants when we are baptized we are not aware of our role as priest, prophet and king. Just like Samuel wasn't aware that God was calling him.

At some point in our lives as Christians we will be aware of God calling us. Some will become aware before others but still we will be called. We

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may be called many times before we become aware or many will just ignore the call.

Others, like in today's Gospel, may be searching for purpose, like John's disciples were searching for the Messiah. God will put an Eli or a John the Baptist in their path to show them the way.

Our job as followers of Christ is to listen for God's voice in all things.

We need our minds open to his voice and our hearts receptive to his truth. This is the only way for us to find real joy in our lives.

Remember the first words from Pope Francis' from ***EVANGELII GAUDIUM***; "The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.

Ask yourself if you would you like to find joy in the Gospel as well as the other readings? Would you like to have a new experience when you come to Mass. I would like to challenge each and everyone of you to take some time this week and look up the readings for next Sunday. This won't take a lot of your time. Read them a couple of times, reflect on what you read and when you come to Mass next week follow along with

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the lector who does the readings and psalm and the deacon or priest who proclaims the Gospel and see if you have a better understanding of what you hear. If you're feeling ambitious write down something that touches you in what you're reading and compare it to what you hear in the homily. I guarantee this will enrich your experience at Mass. I would love to hear from anyone that takes up this challenge. I assure you it will bring me joy.

Hopefully the quote I read from earlier will inspire you to take up my challenge ; “A person needs new experiences. It jars something deep inside, allowing them to grow. Without change something sleeps inside us, and seldom awakens. The sleeper must awaken.”

Let me finish up with these words from a reflection that I read when I was preparing my words for today; **“When we are early in our spiritual journey, we may have difficulty knowing how to discern the voice of God.”**

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Remember Samuel thinking it was Eli calling him, not once but three times.

The reflection continues; **“We may confuse other voices for God’s We may not know what to listen for, or how it feels when God calls out to us.”**

Pray my brothers and sisters that when God calls us we won’t be too busy to listen.