

## **Summer Read 2018 - Reflection Questions**

### ***On the Call to Holiness in Today's World (Gaudete et Exsultate)***

***A quick note about how Papal Documents are written and organized and how that relates to our reflection questions:***

Since Papal documents are usually first written in Latin and then translated into various languages, they are organized by paragraph numbers instead of page numbers - similar to how the Bible is referenced by Book, Chapter and verse instead of page number. This technique allows people who are reading these texts in different languages to all access the same information in a uniform manner. Since some of you may have purchased your own copies of *Gaudete et Exsultate* or downloaded the PDF from the Vatican website, we are also organizing our reflection questions by paragraph number. We hope this allows you to easily discuss the text with others regardless of the format you're using.

#### **Introduction (1-2)**

- Rejoice and be glad. Jesus does not want us to merely exist; he wants us to be saints. Do you remember anything from scripture that calls you to be a saint? What does "rejoice" look like to you?
- Pope Francis' goal is for us to recognize practical ways to be holy "with all its risks, challenges and opportunities." What do you foresee as obstacles to this goal?

### **Chapter 1: The Call to Holiness**

#### **The saints who encourage and accompany us (3-5)**

- (Hebrews 11:1-12:3) "A great cloud of witnesses" calls us to push forward and "run with perseverance." Who do you imagine is on the sidelines cheering you along your path?
- (Revelations 6:9-10) "Surrounded . . . by friends of God, I do not have to carry alone what I could never carry alone." When have you felt alone in carrying a heavy burden? How did you handle this?
- To be a saint requires heroic virtue, sacrificing one's life in martyrdom and selfless giving to others, all as an example of Christ's life. How does it feel to try to imagine living up to this?

#### **The saints "next door" (6-9)**

- "The Holy Spirit bestows holiness in abundance among God's holy and faithful people. . ." Holiness is bestowed not just on one individual, but all groups of people. What group of people you interact with now brings you closest to holiness? Why?
- We are surrounded by the "middle class of holiness." Where do you see signs of holiness in those you encounter every day?
- The presence of the Holy Spirit has become "a common inheritance" among all Christians. Can you identify times when you've shared the involvement of the Holy Spirit with your non-Catholic friends?

### The Lord calls (10-13)

- The theme of this writing is to recognize the calling each of us has “to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect.” “Be holy for I am holy.” How does this feel to you to know that you are called to be holy?
- There are many ways to be holy and many ways to bear witness. The goal is to listen to do what God has in store for each of us. What has God placed in your heart for you to act upon?
- Many women throughout the history of the Church “sustained and transformed” families and communities by the power of their witness. Think of an example of a woman in your lifetime. What was her particular gift(s)?
- Embrace the plan God has for you. “Before you were in the womb I knew you and before you were born I consecrated you. What do you believe God has planned for you?

### For you too (14-18)

- We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Looking at your life at this moment, do you see ways you may be demonstrating ways to be holy?
- You can do all things through Christ crucified, through the Holy Spirit. “In the Church, holy but full of sinners, you will find everything you need to grow to holiness.” Name a time you felt defeated and you called upon the Lord for help. How did that work out for you?
- The path to holiness is filled with small gestures. Name 3 things either you have done or have witnessed someone else do that would be considered a stepping stone.
- The Lord calls us to a conversion that can make grace more evident in our lives. “I will accomplish ordinary actions in an extraordinary way.” What is an example of an ordinary task you could undertake in an extraordinary way?
- We are capable of loving with the Lord’s unconditional love because the Lord is with us to support our fragile and weak life. “In this way our lives demonstrate His power at work—even in the midst of our weakness.” Who is it difficult for you to love? Can you imagine God helping you with this?

### Your mission in Christ (19-24)

- Your mission on earth is your path to holiness, for “this is the will of God . . .” at this time in history to reflect an aspect of the Gospel. What aspect of the Gospel would you most like to embrace?
- Our mission, our path to holiness can only be understood and seen through Christ and His life. “Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us.” What part of Christ’s life do you most identify with? Or what part most fascinates you?
- The measure of “our holiness stems from the stature of Christ in us.” By the power of the Holy Spirit we model our lives in His. What quality of Christ would you most like to emulate?
- When we think of the lives of the saints (or anyone else) do not get caught up in the details. Instead look at the totality of their life, “the reflection of Jesus Christ that emerges when we grasp their overall meaning as a person.” Are you able to look at yourself in the same manner?
- See the entirety of your life as a mission. Listen in prayer and recognize signs. How can you best reflect Jesus Christ in today’s world?
- Recognize the message God wants to send the world through your life. Be renewed by the Spirit; be open to the grace that enlightens. How can you come to know what your message is?

**Activity that sanctifies (25-31)**

- Above all focus on the kingdom of God. What is your image of the Kingdom? How do you fit into this picture?
- Balance your life with contemplation and interaction, silence and service. To what area of your life can you add more balance?
- Often it is difficult to stay focused on our mission with all the distractions of life. What distracts you most from being all you can be?
- Everything we do should identify us with Jesus Christ. This is quite a challenge. What might you do right now to keep this in focus?
- Another difficult task is to quiet the noise of the world we live in and allow God to communicate with us. What message would you like to hear from Him?
- What is the difference between superficial entertainment and healthy leisure?
- A spirit of holiness needs to encompass our entire life. Imagine your path to holiness; what does it look like?

**More alive, more human (32-34)**

- Understand that God is the true Master of every human being. Is there an area of your life where you depended on God to get through?
- We each are called to embrace our role as light of the world, wherever we are. What kind of light are you shining right now? What do you imagine yourself becoming?
- Holiness is “an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace.” What weakness would you like to see touched by grace?

## Chapter 2: Two Subtle Enemies of Holiness

### **Contemporary gnosticism (35-39)**

#### *An intellect without God and without faith*

- Gnostics believe in salvation from their divine knowledge (not the Bible) which comes from the universe and can be used to explain everything. They “reduce Jesus’ teaching to a cold and harsh logic that seeks to dominate everything.” Can you identify people who lean toward a gnostic way of relating?

#### *A doctrine without mystery (40-42)*

- Gnostics have beliefs or knowledge which they use to provide answers, but they do not leave room for mystery in their reasoning. What is one mystery of your faith for which you have no logical explanation?

#### *The limits of reason (43-46)*

- Gnostics believe in one way of interpreting the Gospels and church teaching. But we know there are different ways to interpret God’s word. Has your understanding of the Gospel and church teaching changed throughout your life? How?
- Questioning our faith helps us to understand it. What is one question you would ask of your faith?
- Knowledge does not mean we are holy. What else is required?
- St. Francis warned disciples that teaching should be accompanied “with the spirit of prayer and devotion.” Finish this sentence. “Knowledge without mercy is like . . . “

### **Contemporary pelagianism (47-51)**

#### *A will lacking humility*

- Gnostics value knowledge. Pelagians value the human will, the ability to know right from wrong. What is missing from this? Why do we need to be open to grace?

#### *An often overlooked Church teaching (52-56)*

- How can you explain grace to someone?
- “The gift of grace surpasses the power of human intellect and will.” How do you understand this?
- Our life and the Lord’s love are gifts from God. How can we not share these and be joyful? What keeps us from doing so?

#### *New pelagians (57-59)*

- “The life of the Church can become a museum piece or the possession of a few.” Describe how you see this as happening. Have you experienced this?
- Why should we look at the Gospels as more than a set of rules to be followed?

#### *The summation of the law (60-62)*

- St. Paul tells us the commandments center on one theme, love your neighbor as yourself, or “the face of God reflected in so many other faces.” Talk about how difficult this is to do. What stops you from succeeding?
- Do you see signs of Gnosticism (focusing on the law) or pelagianism (the ability to choose right/wrong without divine aid) in your own beliefs?

### Chapter 3: In the Light of the Master

#### **Going Against the Flow (63-66)**

- What does the word “blessed” mean to you?

#### *Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (67-70)*

- Describe someone who is poor in spirit.
- Is it possible to have material wealth and be poor in spirit?

#### *Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth. (71-74)*

- In ¶173 Pope Francis states, “In the Church we have often erred by not embracing this demand of God’s word.” In other words the Church has not always acted with meekness and humility. Do you agree with this? Can you give an example?
- Being meek means putting your trust and hope in the Lord; this make you holy. Why is this so difficult?

#### *Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. (75-76)*

- Do you find yourself fleeing from situations of suffering or is it easy for you to “weep with those who weep?”

#### *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be fulfilled. (77-79)*

- Hungering and thirsting are intense experiences as they involve our basic needs for survival. Is there an area of your life that you feel that strongly for justice for those most vulnerable? How can you remain focused on this?

#### *Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy. (80-82)*

- The Catechism reminds us to apply the golden rule in every case, especially in difficult decisions and moral judgments. Do you practice this in your daily life?
- Seeing and acting with mercy; that is holiness. What does that look like? Is this difficult for you?

#### *Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. (83-86)*

- “Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love: that is holiness.” Describe how we can see God with a pure heart.

#### *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (87-89)*

- “We need to be artisans of peace, for building peace is a craft that demands serenity, creativity, sensitivity and skill.” How can we be peace-makers?

#### *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (90-94)*

- “The Beatitudes are not easy to live out . . .” Have you faced persecution among family or friends because of your faith?

### **The Great Criterion (95)**

- In ¶95 Pope Francis connects holiness with the mercy we show to those in need. When you think of a person being holy, what key characteristics come to mind?

### *In fidelity to the Master (96-99)*

- Christology is the study of the person and work of Jesus. If Matthew 25 is a “page of Christology”, then it tells us something about who Jesus is and what his mission is. How does this teaching about this passage affect how you look at the poor? How you look at yourself?

### *Ideologies striking at the heart of the Gospel (100-103)*

- Pope Francis named two errors that happen when we separate the social demands of the Gospel from our personal spirituality – we can strip social justice of its spiritual roots, or we can grow suspicious of social justice and begin to relativize various Gospel demands. Which of those errors do you think is the most common?
- How does Pope Francis’ understanding of holiness and social issues challenge the way we often connect religion and politics?

### *The worship most acceptable to God (104-109)*

- How does your prayer transform you?
- How does your prayer and worship benefit those around you?
- What are the pressures on your time?
- What are some things you could do to simplify your life?

## Chapter 4: Signs of Holiness in Today's World

- In ¶110 Pope Francis glosses over some pathways to holiness that he considers givens in the lives of those who wish to become holy (for example prayer, the Sacraments, personal sacrifices, devotions and spiritual direction). Which of those are givens in your life?

### **Perseverance, patience, and meekness (112-121)**

- Pope Francis talks about being grounded in God as a source of inner strength. Where/how do you find inner strength?
- How do you use social media and your interactions online to stay grounded in God?
- How does social media challenge your ability to stay grounded in God? To be patient and humble?
- How does Pope Francis' teaching about humility and suffering in paragraphs 118-121 challenge you? How does it encourage you?

### **Joy and a sense of humor (122-128)**

- What brings you joy?
- What are the differences between pleasure, happiness and joy?

### **Boldness and passion (129-139)**

- What challenges your ability to be bold?
- Pope Francis defines boldness in paragraph 132, and speaks about newness and complacency in the paragraphs that follow. What about our culture, the Church, our parish, your family, or yourself needs to be changed? How can you help bring about that change?

### **In community (140-146)**

- How do you help make the people around you more holy? Who are the people in your life that inspire you to holiness?

### **In constant prayer (147-157)**

- Do you make time for silence in your life?
- As you read paragraph 151, what inspires you? What challenges you?
- Have you ever spent time in silence in front of the Blessed Sacrament? If yes, how did that time affect you? If not, why not?

## Chapter 5: Spiritual Combat, Vigilance, and Discernment

- Does it surprise you to read about spiritual battle as sweet? (158)

### **Combat and vigilance (159-165)**

- In paragraph 159 Pope Francis references the 3 classic enemies of the faithful – the world, the flesh and the devil. What are the things you battle against?
- How does it make you feel to think of life as a spiritual battle?

### *More than a myth (160-161)*

- Do you think of the Devil as a myth or symbol, or as a person?

### *Alert and trustful (162-163)*

- What are your most trusted weapons in spiritual warfare?

### *Spiritual corruption (164-165)*

- Pope Francis writes that spiritual lethargy and corruption are worse than the fall of a sinner. Why do you think he makes this claim?

### **Discernment (166-177)**

#### *An urgent need (167-168)*

- Which is the tougher battle for you – resisting the latest “passing trend” or being open to the “working of the Spirit”?

#### *Always in the light of the Lord (169)*

- When have you prayed for the gift of discernment for helping you through “everyday realities”?

#### *A supernatural gift (170-171)*

- How does it make you feel to know that the gift of discernment is given to everyone who seeks it with a sincere heart?

#### *Speak, Lord (172-173)*

- Pope Francis encourages us that one of the ways the teachings of the Church remain eternal is that they are adaptable to the needs of today. What are some of the sources of wisdom in your family history that have served you well throughout the years? How does this relate to what Pope Francis says about the working of the Holy Spirit?

#### *The logic of the gift and the cross (174-177)*

- Are there areas of your life that you sometimes leave “off limits” to God? What are they?
- What would you like God to help you discover about yourself? What of yourself do you need to leave behind “in order to approach the mystery of God”?