

Gaudete et Exsultate – Rejoice and Be Glad! Session Four

1. Review:

+Pope Francis seeks to ‘re-propose’ the possibility of holiness in our daily lives.

He does so by first directing our attention to the Saints/saints who show us what holiness is.

He calls them the ‘great middle class of holiness.’

+ Then, the Pope points out two mistaken ways of thinking about holiness -

Gnosticism & Pelagianism. These can be summarized: “I know it all, and I can do it all.”

Both of these mistakes make us self-centered, and lead us to pass judgment on others.

+ The Beatitudes of Jesus are like the ‘Christian identity card,’ which present a portrait of Jesus’ simple teaching about holiness.

It is simple, but deeply challenging and prophetic. Are we willing to be shaken up by the Beatitudes?

Poverty of Spirit - I know that I need Him

Meekness – I do not have a right to dominate others.

Mourning – Those who mourn know the reality of suffering in their own lives, and are “unafraid to share in the suffering of others.”

Hunger and thirst for righteousness – True justice comes when we are just in our decisions, and pursue justice for the poor and the weak.

Merciful – “Seeing and acting with mercy – that is holiness.” (#82)

Pure in Heart - Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love

Peacemakers -“Building peace is a craft which demands sincerity, creativity, sensitivity and skill.” (89)

Persecuted for righteousness - If we follow Jesus we will become a ‘nuisance’.

Par. 97 – Don’t try to ‘explain away’ the demands of the Beatitudes! Let them cause in you a “healthy unease.” (Par. 99).

Par. 100 ff – To be truly Catholic and truly holy, all of our outreach and work must be rooted in prayer (cf. St. Francis, Mother Teresa), and we must be **CONSISTENT** in our moral thinking (see 101, for the consistent ethic of life and compassion).

Stanley Hauerwas’ point: it is only possible to live the Beatitudes because:

1. Jesus did it first and showed us the way.
2. He sent the Spirit to give us the grace we need to do it.
3. Living this way will make us more Christ-like, which is the whole point.
4. Christ has gathered the community in which “Beatitude living” is possible!

2. CHAPTER 4

If we contemplate/appreciate the models of holiness we meet, and if we strive to live the Beatitudes, what signs will be seen in our lives which demonstrate that we are on the right path? (If we are eating the right foods, we will feel well and lose weight. If we are getting enough rest, we will feel better and think clearly.) So what signs will we see in our lives if we are on the path to holiness?

Par.111 – The Pope lists the ‘symptoms’ we see in a self-centered world. People who are full of ‘anxiety, negativity, sullenness, etc.

SIGNS THAT WE ARE ON THE PATH TO HOLINESS:

- + Patience/constancy – I have faith in God, and I believe that God is always with me. My faith should make me faithful to others. I do not abandon them in their time of need. (112)
- + Humility – a humility which avoid verbal violence (115!), a humility which puts others first (117) and which follows Jesus through the humiliations of life to a heart of compassion (118-120).
- + Joy and a sense of Humor – Holiness does not lead to people who are “morose or dreary.” (122). Holiness leads to authentic joy. See especially paragraph 125 and 126. This joy leads to gratitude for everything (127).
- + Boldness in word (*parrhesia*) and action. Freedom (129) to carry of the work of the Gospel. Look at the freedom and boldness of Jesus (131)! Open to what is new (135) and willing to be sent by Christ (136) to new places.

These positive signs are best nurtured 1) in community (140, and esp. 144-145), 2) by prayer (which includes silence, art, music, petition, worship (cf. 150-151) and 3) sacraments.

CHAPTER 5 - Spiritual Combat & Discernment: We will face resistance, so we must always discern what God is telling us to do

Par.159- The devil is a reality, not a symbol or an absence or a metaphor for something else.

Par. 160- Jesus himself taught us to pray, “Deliver us from evil” or “the evil one”.

Par. 161- “The devil does not need to possess us. He poisons us with the venom of hatred...”

Shakespeare: “When devils will their blackest sins put on, they do suggest at first with heavenly shows.” (Othello, Act 2, scene 3)

Whenever we start talking about the Devil, people are tempted to two extremes: 1) they dismiss the notion as an ancient fable or 2) they see the Devil everywhere and became fearful.

What can help us in our battle with evil? Prayer, meditation on the Word of God, Mass, Eucharistic adoration, confession, works of charity, community life and missionary outreach (162). These will help us to be honest and avoid the temptation to convince ourselves that we never sin (164).

+Discernment: According to St. Ignatius of Loyola, every Christian should learn the art of discernment in order to know if they are doing the will of God. To oversimplify, there are four steps:

1. Pay attention to the questions that are arising in your conscience. Evil spirits tell us to rationalize everything and explain away our behaviors. The Holy Spirit raises important questions we know we have to deal with.
2. Evil spirits typically suggest ways of acting which take us away from the Lord, his church, and his people. They constantly raise doubts and fears and lead to isolation. The Holy Spirit always calls us to actions which will increase our faith, hope and love. The Holy Spirit always calls us beyond ourselves to serve others, even when that requires sacrifice.
3. If we are doing God’s will, we will experience “consolation” on a deep level. Consolation is a deep sense of peace which leads us to desire communion with God, distance from past sins, and compassion for the sufferings of Christ and his people.
4. If we are NOT doing God’s will, we will experience “desolation.” This is a deep sense of turmoil, lack of quiet or peace, constant temptation for earthly fulfillment, etc.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 4:

1. Where do you find your strength so that you can persevere in life? How is that strength tested?
2. What tests your patience? What helps you to remain patient?
3. The Pope describe joy as the “personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.” Do you know someone who has that joy? When have YOU had that joy?
4. In your life as a Christian, how do you want to ‘leave a mark’ in this world?
5. How has the community of the Church helped you to grow in holiness?
6. The Pope speaks about a type of prayer ‘without words.’ How have you tried to pray without words?
7. In the Lord’s Prayer, we say “Deliver us from evil.” What do you mean when you pray that prayer?
8. What forms of ‘spiritual blindness’ do you see around you? What form of spiritual blindness impacts you?
9. The Pope recommends a ‘daily examination of conscience.’ Have you ever included this in your daily prayer? What did you experience?
10. The Pope has invited us to be saints. How has this Exhortation inspired you to be open to this call to holiness?