

Gaudete et Exsultate – Rejoice and Be Glad! Session One

1. THE DOCUMENT

- a) Pope Francis published *Gaudete et Exsultate* on March 19, 2018.
- b) Church documents receive their ‘titles’ from the first few words of 1st sentence.
- c) “Gaudete et exsultate” = “rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.” (Matt. 5:12, The Beatitudes)
- d) The Pope starts with words like “rejoice” and “be glad.” This whole document is an invitation for us to discover the *joy* which comes when we discover what God wants in our lives and do it!

2. STRUCTURE OF POPE FRANCIS’ TEACHING

- a) Par. 2 – This document is not “a treatise on holiness, full of definitions and distinctions.” (Almost tongue in cheek,) “My modest goal... to repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own times....”
- b) Pope Francis structures the presentation in an unusual way:
 - Chapter 1 - The *people* who show us what holiness looks like. Saints who inspire us – Saints with a capital “S” and small “s”
 - Chapter 2 – Subtle enemies of holiness. Two ancient heresies that at work today.
 - Gnosticism* – Salvation is result of a secret, higher knowledge available only to a select few. Destroys sense of mystery of God – we can never fully comprehend God.
 - Pelagianism* – Salvation is result of humans doing holy things, good works, which in a sense force God to give us a reward. Destroys sense of God’s grace.
 - “I know it all, and I can do it all.”
 - Chapter 3 - The Beatitudes (Matt. 5) teach us what holiness is. Jesus is the teacher!
 - Chapter 4 – The *signs* of holiness in our daily lives.
 - Chapter 5 – The challenges we may face in living holiness.

+++ CHAPTER ONE

Par. 1 – “The Lord asks everything of us, and in return offers us true life.” This is why we were created: to be saints.

Par. 3 – We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses (the Saints). The pope refers to the “official Saints” plus mothers, grandmothers. Holiness does not = moral perfection.

Par. 4 – The Saints pray for us, preserving “the bond of love and communion.” The saints pray for us and inspire us. They also show that living the Gospel IS POSSIBLE!

Par. 5 – Bl. Maria Sagheddu – 1914-1939. Italian. A life dedicated to others, focused on something bigger than self. This is what the pope invites us to honor.

Par. 6 – Saints with a small “s” - look around your faith community & family. Who are the examples of holiness right there?

Commitment to community and family is crucial. In Par. 6, Pope Francis quotes Vat. II: God makes us holy in a COMMUNITY. “No one is saved alone, as an isolated individual.” This stands as a challenge to those who say that they are “spiritual but not religious,” or those who say that they can “pray at home without belonging to a church...”

Par. 7 – We discover saints in the communities we belong to. Look at examples the Pope gives!

At one point he mentions the “church militant.”

Church “militant” – Christians on earth, who still have to ‘fight’ against sin and temptation.

Church “penitent” – Those being purified after death.

Church “triumphant” – Those already experiencing the joys of seeing God face to face.

The saints show us the “middle class of holiness!”

Par. 8 – It is through the faith and charity of ordinary people that the world’s history can be changed, and this is especially true in the darkest times. Teresa Benedicta (Edith Stein) 1891-1942.

Par. 9 – “Holiness is the most attractive face of the church!” Note that holiness is not limited to Catholicism. Ecumenism of holiness, and martyrdom.

Par. 10 – The Saints help us to see what holiness looks like, and remind us that it is possible, and show us the joyful results. When we look at their lives, we are seeing Christ at work in them.

The call to holiness is universal (Vatican II).

Pope Francis: The Lord addresses each of US, and the call is addressed personally to YOU.

Par. 11 – We are not called to a holiness that we cannot attain. God does not set us up for failure. The holiness of someone else is NOT necessarily the holiness that God has in mind for YOU. In the past, only CERTAIN examples were considered ‘holy’ – usually priests or nuns.

In Par. 11, Pope Francis says – “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.” This is our vocation in life. How I do it is going to be different than how you do it!

Par. 12 – Women will do it differently than men, and will teach all of us in the process.

Par. 14 – “We are tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer.”

Note what he says: “We are called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness (to Christ) in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves.” A great definition of holiness! A great definition of why we are here on earth!

Par. 15 – We will always make mistakes, but we can pray to become “a little bit better.”

Par. 16 – Great examples of some small steps toward holiness.

Par. 19 & 20 – Holiness is my MISSION, it is my purpose on earth, so that others can be blessed through me.

The greatest example of holiness is Christ himself. Being holy means, at its core, being in union with Christ, and living the mysteries of his life in my life. So when something is happening in my life, I try to make the connection between how this happened in Jesus’ life, and then seeing how he responded.

Par. 21 – “In the end, it is Christ who loves in us.” John the Baptist said – “He must increase, so I must decrease.” (John 3:30)

A great image with which to pray:

- + Jesus, I don’t know how to love that person. So please love them through me.
- + Jesus, I don’t know how to forgive that person....
- + Jesus, I don’t know how to serve that person...

Par. 22 – Holiness is not found in a morally perfect life, e.g. St. Augustine, Dorothy Day. Pope Francis says – if we see their life as a mission, then we have to look at their whole life, not just one moment in it. What would happen if we took that into consideration all the time as we deal with other people?

Par. 23 – Your mission in life = “Always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received.”

Par. 25 & 26 – This mission of holiness is not meant to make us self-centered. Rather, we are called to the mission of holiness so that the Kingdom of God can be revealed in the world - a kingdom of “love, justice and universal peace.” We are not meant to “flee interaction with others.”

Par. 29 – We need a spirituality which is BALANCED. We must have personal prayer, sacraments, quiet time, which LEADS to service and charity. We get into trouble when we get that out of balance.

Pope Francis gets specific about the need for quiet time and personal prayer. And this is hard because of “constantly new gadgets.” Read the Pope’s very honest warning about the “rat race” we are in, and the “superficial pleasures” which lead to “discontent.”

Par. 32 – “Don’t be afraid of holiness.” By living authentic holiness, “you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self.”

Par. 34 – “Set your sights higher” and “be guided by the Spirit.”

“The only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.” (Leon Bloy)

Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*:

"He was not at the moment afraid of damnation—even the fear of pain was in the background. He felt only an immense disappointment because he had to go to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all. It seemed to him at that moment that it would have been quite easy to have been a saint. It would only have needed a little self-restraint, and a little courage. He felt like someone who has missed happiness by seconds at an appointed place. He knew now that at the end there was only one thing that counted—to be a saint."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION FOR REFLECTION (Chapter One):

1. Who are the 'saints next door' in your experience?
2. Which of the official Saints of the church inspires you?
3. The Pope says that holiness happens when we 'open our hearts to grace and practice self-giving love in our daily routine.' Have you seen that in someone else? Have you seen it happen in your own life?
4. In paragraph 16, the Pope describes 'small steps toward holiness' which can happen in daily life. How have you experienced the opportunity for these 'small steps' in the past week?
5. How do you try to balance pray and activity?
6. How is technology creating a challenge for your prayer and peace?
7. How much time do you give to prayer on a daily or weekly basis?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 2:

1. If someone asked you to define "Gnosticism," what would you say?
2. Why is it spiritually dangerous to let yourself believe that you 'know what you need to know,' or 'know all that you need to know'?
3. The Pope says that when someone has an answer to every question, it is a sign that they are not on the right road. Have you ever met someone like this? Have you every fallen into this way of thinking yourself?
4. If we avoid Gnostic thinking, we are in touch with the fact that the mystery of God is bigger than our ability to fully comprehend. This means that we can spend a lifetime learning about God, and there will always be more to learn. How has your understanding of God grown, deepened, expanded over time?
5. Pelagius suggested that humans could basically reach perfection if they just worked hard enough. This gave rise to the idea that we can achieve salvation by just doing more and more good works. Have you ever heard a preacher or teacher who still suggest this kind of thinking? Is this part of your own thinking?
6. The church teaches that salvation is a free gift from God (grace), and that all the good work we do on earth is a grateful response to God's gift. Is it hard to keep those two ideas in balance in our busy lives?
7. One problem with Pelagianism is that it reduced God's gift to something we think we can 'earn.' How could a spirit of 'gratitude' help us to avoid that mistake?
8. The Pope says that we are called to stay focused on God's face, and to see God's face in others. What helps you to do that? What makes that difficult?