

Gaudete et Exsultate – Rejoice and Be Glad! Session Three

1. Review: In order to ‘repropose’ the possibility of holiness in our daily lives, the Pope first directed our attention to the Saints and the saints who show us what holiness is. He encouraged us to observe the examples of holiness in the people around us. He called them the “great middle class of holiness”. Then, the Pope pointed out two mistaken ways of thinking about holiness. One was Gnosticism and the other Pelagianism. These can be summarized in this way: “I know it all, and I can do it all.” Both of these mistaken belief systems cause us to become self-centered, and they lead us to pass judgment on those who don’t think or act like I do. With that background, the Pope then moves forward with a reflection on the simplicity of Jesus’ teaching about holiness.

Par. 63 - “The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card.”

“We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount.” Here we find the portrait which we are called to reflect.

Par. 64 - “Beatitude”

+ *beatus* (Latin) = blessed, happy

+ *makarios* (Greek) = *blessed, fortunate, happy*

+ Also found in the Old Testament (e.g. Psalm 2:12 – “Blessed are those who take refuge in the Lord.”)

+ *ashrei* (Hebrew) = the joy of walking in righteousness

There is no verb in the beginning of the sentence. It is more like an exclamation: *Blessed the poor in spirit!*

The Greek word in the original text of the Gospels (*makarios*) has its root in a Greek work which means to *extend* or *expand*. Note that Jesus does not issue a command in the Beatitudes: he describes what ‘blessedness’ will look like in the lives of believers. But this does not mean that the Beatitudes are undemanding. As the Pope says, “We can only practice them if the Holy Spirit fills us with power and frees us from our weakness, our selfishness, our complacency and pride.” (Par. 65). So, as always, God takes the initiative.

We have all heard of the ‘long arm of the law.’ So maybe the *makarios* (*lengthening*) of the Beatitudes means that God is reaching out the ‘long arm of his mercy’ toward us, expanding our hearts, stretching our lives toward growth and giving, increasing our capacity to love as Jesus loved, and –as a result – to find the joy which fills us when we are living the life God intended for us!

Par. 66 – Let’s be open to the challenge, and let the text unsettle us.

Note from OT – Moses went up the mountain to receive the law from God. Jesus goes up the Mount of Beatitudes, and there teaches us the core of his message.

Par. 67-70: Poor in Spirit – where do we seek/try to find security in life?

Poverty of Spirit = I know that I need Him.

If I think I have it all under control, I will never turn to the Lord.

Holy Indifference = I know that the things of this earth (\$, beauty, my Waterford collection!) all pass away, so I am not going to get all worked up over what does not matter. To follow the example of Jesus, who became poor so as to be a neighbor to the poor.

Par. 71-74: Meek – **I do not have a right to dominate others.**

It takes great energy to stay angry! I can correct or assist another, but I am called to do this with meekness and humility.

Jesus' ultimate strength is revealed on the cross. Who shows you that meekness and humility is a revelation of strong faith?

Par 75-76: Mourn – The world seeks to disregard painful situations and avert our gaze from the tears of others. We want suffering to be concealed. But the Cross is always present. **Those who mourn know the reality of suffering in their own lives, and are “unafraid to share in the suffering of others”** (Par.76). If we know our woundedness, we will be willing to touch the wounds of others. “Jesus wept.”

Par. 77-79: Hunger and thirst for righteousness – True justice comes when we are just in our decisions and pursue justice for the poor and the weak. (Par. 79)

Par. 80-82: Merciful - MT. 7:12 – the Golden Rule. The Pope quotes the catechism, saying that we should apply this rule in every case, even when making moral judgments in murky circumstances. The yardstick we use to measure others will measure the mercy we receive (Par. 81). **“Seeing and acting with mercy – that is holiness”** (Par. 82).

Par. 83-86: Pure in Heart – **“Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love: that is holiness.”** (Par. 85)

Par. 87-89 – Peacemakers.

Those who engage in gossip are not peacemakers. (social media?)

Peacemaking requires inclusivity (Par. 89) – it is easy to ‘have peace’ when you exclude everyone who does not think like you! It also requires an honest conversation about conflict.

“Building peace is a craft which demands sincerity, creativity, sensitivity and skill.”

(Par 89)

Par. 90-94 – Persecuted for sake of righteousness. **If we follow Jesus we will become a ‘nuisance.’** Jesus is honest that following him will require that we pick up the Cross. Have we settled for a bland Christianity which will not upset anyone, just so that we can fit in? Has the salt lost its flavor?

Par. 96 - “Holiness is not about swooning in mystic rapture.” We are called to see Christ in the poor and suffering, and respond.

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 – to be truly Catholic and truly holy, all of our outreach and work must be rooted in prayer (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!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 3:

1. How hard is it to think of happiness (blessedness) as holiness?
2. What part of the Beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit"? challenges you? How can this Beatitude lead us to happiness?
3. Meekness is not a popular virtue. In the competitive world that we live in, how can we promote meekness as a virtue?
4. Pope Francis suggests that people who imitate the compassion of Jesus are blessed. How do we keep from turning our heads away from those we encounter who are suffering?
5. Having a hunger or thirst for justice is a powerful force. How do you maintain your passion for justice when you feel worn down? What helps you be just?
6. Which do you find harder to do—helping and serving others or giving forgiveness and understanding?
7. It is the intentions of our hearts that defile us. How do you work to keep your heart pure?
8. How do you work to sow peace in your community, and in your world when conflict and division surround us daily?
9. Living according to the Gospel and the Beatitudes will not be easy! When have you felt persecuted for living your faith?
10. The Pope is concerned that the demands of a consumer society and the pace of social media make it increasingly difficult for Christians to find the time they need for reflective prayer. How do you avoid this?

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, you 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?