

EXTRACTS FROM POPE FRANCIS':

GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE 2018 (Rejoice and be Glad)

The Holy Father's Apostolic Exhortation '*Gaudete et Exsultate*' is based on the fact that our faith is not dependant on a book, a place or a people but in the person of Jesus Christ:

CHAPTER ONE

THE CALL TO HOLINESS

FOR YOU TOO

'To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. 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. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by labouring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain.' [14]

'Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to him in every situation. Do not be dismayed, for the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (cf. *Gal* 5:22-23). [15]

'Holiness begins with little things – the refusal to engage in gossip, listening with patience and love to others when we are feeling tired; in anxiety to turn; in faith, to the Virgin Mary. [16] To live fully in the present moment, 'filling it to the brim with love' [17]

YOUR MISSION IN CHRIST

'At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord's death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him. But it can also entail reproducing in our own lives various aspects of Jesus' earthly life: his hidden life, his life in community, his closeness to the outcast, his poverty and other ways in which he showed his self-sacrificing love. [20]

"holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full". (Benedict XVI, *Catechesis*, General Audience of 13 April 2011: *Insegnamenti* VII (2011), 451) [21]

ACTIVITY THAT SANCTIFIES

'It is not healthy to love silence while fleeing interaction with others, to want peace and quiet while avoiding activity, to seek prayer while disdaining service. Everything can be accepted and integrated into our life in this world, and become a part of our path to holiness. We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission. [26]

“life does not have a mission, but is a mission”. (Xavier Zubiri, *Naturaleza, historia, Dios*, Madrid, 1993³, 427) [27]

‘We are overwhelmed by words, by superficial pleasures and by an increasing din, filled not by joy but rather by the discontent of those whose lives have lost meaning. How can we fail to realize the need to stop this rat race and to recover the personal space needed to carry on a heartfelt dialogue with God? Finding that space may prove painful but it is always fruitful. Sooner or later, we have to face our true selves and let the Lord enter. [29]

CHAPTER 2

TWO SUBTLE ENEMIES OF HOLINESS

(This chapter deals with Pelagianism – everything depends on us - and Gnosticism - an intellect without God and without flesh.)

Gnosticism seeks to ‘domesticate the mystery’ [40]

‘Someone who wants everything to be clear and sure presumes to control God’s transcendence. [41]

‘If we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit rather than our own preconceptions, we can and must try to find the Lord in every human life. [42]

‘Those who yield to this pelagian or semi-pelagian mindset, even though they speak warmly of God’s grace, “ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style”. (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 94: AAS 105 (2013), 1059) [49]

‘Grace, precisely because it builds on nature, does not make us superhuman all at once. [50]

‘We need to lose our fear before that presence which can only be for our good. God is the Father who gave us life and loves us greatly. Once we accept him, and stop trying to live our lives without him, the anguish of loneliness will disappear (cf. *Ps* 139:23-24). In this way we will know the pleasing and perfect will of the Lord (cf. *Rom* 12:1-2) and allow him to mould us like a potter (cf. *Is* 29:16). So often we say that God dwells in us, but it is better to say that we dwell in him, that he enables us to dwell in his light and love. He is our temple; we ask to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life (cf. *Ps* 27:4). “For one day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere” (*Ps* 84:10). In him is our holiness. [51]

“In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you empty-handed, for I do not ask you, Lord, to count my works. All our justices have stains in your sight”. (St Therese of the Child Jesus, “Act of Offering to Merciful Love” (Prayers, 6) [54]

‘The primacy belongs to the theological virtues, which have God as their object and motive. At the centre is charity. [60]

‘...amid the thicket of precepts and prescriptions, Jesus clears a way to seeing two faces, that of the Father and that of our brother. He does not give us two more formulas or two more commands. He gives us two faces, or better yet, one alone: the face of God reflected in so many other faces. [61]

CHAPTER THREE

IN THE LIGHT OF THE MASTER

'The Beatitudes are like a Christian's identity card. So if anyone asks: "What must one do to be a good Christian?", the answer is clear. [63]

'Usually the rich feel secure in their wealth, and think that, if that wealth is threatened, the whole meaning of their earthly life can collapse. Jesus himself tells us this in the parable of the rich fool: he speaks of a man who was sure of himself, yet foolish, for it did not dawn on him that he might die that very day (cf. *Lk* 12:16-21). [67]

"We need to train ourselves to be indifferent in our attitude to all created things, in all that is permitted to our free will and not forbidden; so that on our part, we do not set our hearts on good health rather than bad, riches rather than poverty, honour rather than dishonour, a long life rather than a short one, and so in all the rest" (*Spiritual Exercises*, 23d) [68]

We need to cultivate 'holy indifference' [69]

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth"

'Saint Thérèse of Lisieux tells us that "perfect charity consists in putting up with others' mistakes, and not being scandalized by their faults" – (Manuscript C, 12r) [72]

'In every situation, the meek put their hope in the Lord, and those who hope for him shall possess the land... and enjoy the fullness of peace. [74]

'The world tells us exactly the opposite: entertainment, pleasure, diversion and escape make for the good life. The worldly person ignores problems of sickness or sorrow in the family or all around him; he averts his gaze. The world has no desire to mourn; it would rather disregard painful situations, cover them up or hide them. [75]

'Knowing how to mourn with others: that is holiness.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled"

'Hungering and thirsting for righteousness: that is holiness.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy"

'In the Gospel of Luke we do not hear the words, "Be perfect" (*Mt* 5:48), but rather, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you" (6:36-38). Luke then adds something not to be overlooked: "The measure you give will be the measure you get back" (6:38). The yardstick we use for understanding and forgiving others will measure the forgiveness we receive. [81]

Seeing and acting with mercy: that is holiness.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"

'The Bible uses the heart to describe our real intentions, the things we truly seek and desire, apart from all appearances. "Man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart" (1Sam 16:7). God wants to speak to our hearts (cf. Hos 2:16); there he desires to write his law (cf. Jer 31:33). In a word, he wants to give us a new heart (cf. Ezek 36:26). [83]

'In Matthew's Gospel too, we see that what proceeds from the heart is what defiles a person (cf. 15:18), [85]

'Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love: that is holiness.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God"

'... we ourselves are often a cause of conflict or at least of misunderstanding. For example, I may hear something about someone and I go off and repeat it. [87]

'Sowing peace all around us: that is holiness.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

'Jesus himself warns us that the path he proposes goes against the flow, even making us challenge society by the way we live and, as a result, becoming a nuisance. He reminds us how many people have been, and still are, persecuted simply because they struggle for justice, because they take seriously their commitment to God and to others. Unless we wish to sink into an obscure mediocrity, let us not long for an easy life, for "whoever would save his life will lose it" (Mt 16:25). [90]

THE GREAT CRITERION

'If we seek the holiness pleasing to God's eyes, this text offers us one clear criterion on which we will be judged. "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (vv. 35-36). [95]

'If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian! Can holiness somehow be understood apart from this lively recognition of the dignity of each human being? [98]

'Christianity (can become) a sort of NGO stripped of the luminous mysticism so evident in the lives of Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, and many others. For these great saints, mental prayer, the love of God and the reading of the Gospel in no way detracted from their passionate and effective commitment to their neighbours; quite the opposite. [100]

'Saint Teresa of Calcutta clearly realized that: "... I have many human faults and failures... But God bends down and uses us, you and me, to be his love and his compassion in the world; he bears our sins, our troubles and our faults. He depends on us to love the world and to show how much he loves it. If

we are too concerned with ourselves, we will have no time left for others". (Cited (in Spanish translation) in: *Cristo en los Pobres*, Madrid, 1981, 37-38) [107]

'Hedonism and consumerism can prove our downfall, for when we are obsessed with our own pleasure, we end up being all too concerned about ourselves and our rights, and we feel a desperate need for free time to enjoy ourselves. [108]

CHAPTER FOUR

SIGNS OF HOLINESS IN TODAY'S WORLD

PERSEVERANCE, PATIENCE AND MEEKNESS

'... a solid grounding in the God who loves and sustains us. ... Such inner strength makes it possible for us, in our fast-paced, noisy and aggressive world, to give a witness of holiness through patience and constancy in doing good. [112]

'We need to recognize and combat our aggressive and selfish inclinations, and not let them take root. "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger" (*Eph 4:26*). When we feel overwhelmed, we can always cling [114]

'The saints do not waste energy complaining about the failings of others; they can hold their tongue before the faults of their brothers and sisters, and avoid the verbal violence that demeans and mistreats others. Saints hesitate to treat others harshly; they consider others better than themselves (cf. *Phil 2:3*). [116]

'It is not good when we look down on others like heartless judges, lording it over them and always trying to teach them lessons. That is itself a subtle form of violence. [116]

'Humility can only take root in the heart through humiliations. Without them, there is no humility or holiness. If you are unable to suffer and offer up a few humiliations, you are not humble and you are not on the path to holiness. [118]

JOY AND A SENSE OF HUMOUR

'Ill humour is no sign of holiness. [126]

'This is not the joy held out by today's individualistic and consumerist culture. Consumerism only bloats the heart. It can offer occasional and passing pleasures, but not joy. [128]

BOLDNESS AND PASSION

'Look at Jesus. His deep compassion reached out to others. It did not make him hesitant, timid or self-conscious, as often happens with us. Quite the opposite. His compassion made him go out actively to preach and to send others on a mission of healing and liberation. Let us acknowledge our weakness, but allow Jesus to lay hold of it and send us too on mission. We are weak, yet we hold a treasure [131]

'Like the prophet Jonah, we are constantly tempted to flee to a safe haven. It can have many names: individualism, spiritualism, living in a little world, addiction, intransigence, the rejection of new ideas and approaches, dogmatism, nostalgia, pessimism, hiding behind rules and regulations. [134]

' God is eternal newness. He impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond. ... God is not afraid! He is fearless! He is always greater than our plans and schemes. Unafraid of the fringes, he himself became a fringe (cf. *Phil* 2:6-8; *Jn* 1:14). So if we dare to go to the fringes, we will find him there; indeed, he is already there. Jesus is already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, in their troubles and in their profound desolation. [135]

'True enough, we need to open the door of our hearts to Jesus, who stands and knocks (cf. *Rev* 3:20). Sometimes I wonder, though, if perhaps Jesus is already inside us and knocking on the door for us to let him escape from our stale self-centredness. [136]

IN COMMUNITY

' Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others. [141]

' Let us not forget that Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details.

The little detail that wine was running out at a party.

The little detail that one sheep was missing.

The little detail of noticing the widow who offered her two small coins.

The little detail of having spare oil for the lamps, should the bridegroom delay.

The little detail of asking the disciples how many loaves of bread they had.

The little detail of having a fire burning and a fish cooking as he waited for the disciples at daybreak.

[144]

'A community that cherishes the little details of love,^[107] whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father's plan. [145]

'Contrary to the growing consumerist individualism that tends to isolate us in a quest for well-being apart from others, our path to holiness can only make us identify all the more with Jesus' prayer "that all may be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you" (*Jn* 17:21). [146]

'Finally, though it may seem obvious, we should remember that holiness consists in a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration. [147]

'Saint John of the Cross tells us: "Endeavour to remain always in the presence of God, either real, imaginative, or unitive, insofar as is permitted by your works". (*Degrees of Perfection*, 2) [148]

'We need to remember that "contemplation of the face of Jesus, died and risen, restores our humanity, even when it has been broken by the troubles of this life or marred by sin. We must not domesticate the power of the face of Christ".^[113] So let me ask you: Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord's presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze? Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let him warm you more and more with his love and tenderness, you will not catch fire. How will you then be able to set the hearts of others on fire by your words and witness? If, gazing on the face of Christ, you feel unable to let yourself be healed and transformed, then

enter into the Lord's heart, into his wounds, for that is the abode of divine mercy. (cf. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Canticum Canticorum*, 61, 3-5: PL 183:1071-1073) [151]

'...never regard prayerful silence as a form of escape and rejection of the world around us. [152]

'Prayer of intercession has particular value, for it is an act of trust in God and, at the same time, an expression of love for our neighbour, ... Intercessory prayer is an expression of our fraternal concern for others, since we are able to embrace their lives, their deepest troubles and their loftiest dreams. Of those who commit themselves generously to intercessory prayer we can apply the words of Scripture: "This is a man who loves the brethren and prays much for the people" (2 Mac 15:14). [154]

"As soon as I believed that there was a God, I understood that I could do nothing other than to live for him". (Bl. Charles de Foucauld, *Letter to Henry de Castries*, 14 August 1901) [155]

CHAPTER FIVE

SPIRITUAL COMBAT, VIGILANCE AND DISCERNMENT

The devil: 'we should not think of the devil as a myth, a representation, a symbol, a figure of speech or an idea ... The devil does not need to possess us. He poisons us with the venom of hatred, desolation, envy and vice. When we let down our guard, he takes advantage of it to destroy our lives, our families and our communities. "Like a roaring lion, he prowls around, looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). [161]

'Spiritual corruption is worse than the fall of a sinner, for it is a comfortable and self-satisfied form of blindness. Everything then appears acceptable: deception, slander, egotism and other subtle forms of self-centredness, for "even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14). [165]

* * * *

'I would like these reflections to be crowned by Mary, because she lived the Beatitudes of Jesus as none other. She is that woman who rejoiced in the presence of God, who treasured everything in her heart, and who let herself be pierced by the sword. Mary is the saint among the saints, blessed above all others. She teaches us the way of holiness and she walks ever at our side. She does not let us remain fallen and at times she takes us into her arms without judging us. Our converse with her consoles, frees and sanctifies us. Mary our Mother does not need a flood of words. She does not need us to tell her what is happening in our lives. All we need do is whisper, time and time again: "Hail Mary..." [176]