

Pope Francis *Gaudete et Exsultate*: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World
Chapter 1. The call to holiness.

"Their lives may not always have been perfect, yet even amid their faults and failings they kept moving forward and proved pleasing to the Lord." (#3)

"We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people." (#6)

"Let us be spurred on by the signs of holiness that the Lord shows us through the humblest members of that people which "shares also in Christ's prophetic office, spreading abroad a living witness to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity"." (#8)

"But even outside the Catholic Church and in very different contexts, the Holy Spirit raises up "signs of his presence which help Christ's followers"." (#9)

"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 (cf. 1 Cor 12:7), rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them." (#11)

"At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life ... 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)

"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." (#23)

"Needless to say, anything done out of anxiety, pride or the need to impress others will not lead to holiness." (#28)

"Sooner or later, we have to face our true selves and let the Lord enter." (#29)

"Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self." (#32)

"Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God." (#34)

Some questions for group reflection:

- Can we identify the key people, great and small, who have formed our organisation (Founder of Religious Institute, CEO, Trustees, donors, volunteers, external supporters etc)?
- Can we give thanks for the ways they have/continue to direct/nurture your organisation?
- Are we being true to the better self that Christ calls us to be?
- Have we previously been, or are we now being called to, adopt new ministries, structures or approaches?
- Are we being compelled by the heart and mind of Christ within us or dragged along by the "ought to" and "shoulds" put upon us by others?
- Are we afraid to be seen as people of faith? Do we have a corporate and shared spirituality?

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Chapter 2. Two subtle enemies of holiness



“When somebody has an answer for every question, it is a sign that they are not on the right road.” (#41)

“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)

“Here I would note that in the Church there legitimately coexist different ways of interpreting many aspects of doctrine and Christian life; in their variety, they “help to express more clearly the immense riches of God’s word”. (#43)

“...what we think we know should always motivate us to respond more fully to God’s love. Indeed, “you learn so as to live: theology and holiness are inseparable”. (#45)

“They fail to realize that “not everyone can do everything”, and that in this life human weaknesses are not healed completely and once for all by grace. In every case, as Saint Augustine taught, God commands you to do what you can and to ask for what you cannot, and indeed to pray to him humbly: “Grant what you command, and command what you will””. (#49)

“Grace acts in history; ordinarily it takes hold of us and transforms us progressively.” (#50)

“We must first belong to God, offering ourselves to him who was there first, and entrusting to him our abilities, our efforts, our struggle against evil and our creativity, so that his free gift may grow and develop within us...” (#56)

“Once we believe that everything depends on human effort as channelled by ecclesial rules and structures, we unconsciously complicate the Gospel and become enslaved to a blueprint that leaves few openings for the working of grace.” (#59)

Some questions for group reflection:

- Can we recall a time when our assumptions were challenged and we changed our mind?
- Do we as individuals, and as a group, leave room for new perspectives – from both within and outside our group?
- Do we pray when making big decisions? In our prayer do we leave space and quiet for us as a group to hear the Spirit’s response?

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Chapter 3. In the light of the master

"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. In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives." (#63)

"Let us listen once more to Jesus, with all the love and respect that the Master deserves. Let us allow his words to unsettle us, to challenge us and to demand a real change in the way we live. Otherwise, holiness will remain no more than an empty word." (#66)

"Luke does not speak of poverty "of spirit" but simply of those who are "poor" (cf. Lk 6:20). In this way, he too invites us to live a plain and austere life." (#70)

"But if we regard the faults and limitations of others with tenderness and meekness, without an air of superiority, we can actually help them and stop wasting our energy on useless complaining." (#72)

"A person who sees things as they truly are and sympathizes with pain and sorrow is capable of touching life's depths and finding authentic happiness." (#76)

"True justice comes about in people's lives when they themselves are just in their decisions; it is expressed in their pursuit of justice for the poor and the weak." (#79)

"Mercy has two aspects. It involves giving, helping and serving others, but it also includes forgiveness and understanding." (#80)

"Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love: that is holiness." (#86)

"Sowing peace all around us: that is holiness." (#89)

"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." (#90)

"Whatever weariness and pain we may experience in living the commandment of love and following the way of justice, the cross remains the source of our growth and sanctification." (#92)

"Accepting daily the path of the Gospel, even though it may cause us problems: that is holiness." (#94)

"The text of Matthew 25:35-36 is "not a simple invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ". In this call to recognize him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to imitate." (#96)

"Our worship becomes pleasing to God when we devote ourselves to living generously, and allow God's gift, granted in prayer, to be shown in our concern for our brothers and sisters." (#104)

Some questions for group reflection:

- Take time to hear Christ speak to us in the Luke 6:20–22 and Matthew 25:35-36 and "...allow his words to unsettle us, to challenge us and to demand a real change in the way we live."
- Do our interactions with each other and with others demonstrate the love described in Luke 6:20–22 and Matthew 25:35-36?
- Are we being called as a group to personally undertake some act of charity?

Five great expressions of love for God and neighbour:

1. PERSEVERANCE, PATIENCE AND MEEKNESS

"...solid grounding in the God who loves and sustains us." (#112) "Humiliation makes you resemble Jesus; it is an unavoidable aspect of the imitation of Christ." (#118)

2. JOY AND A SENSE OF HUMOUR

"If we allow the Lord to draw us out of our shell and change our lives, then we can do as Saint Paul tells us: "Rejoice in the Lord always; I say it again, rejoice!" (Phil 4:4)." (#122)

3. BOLDNESS AND PASSION

"We need the Spirit's prompting, lest we be paralyzed by fear and excessive caution, lest we grow used to keeping within safe bounds." (#133) and

"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." (#135)

4. IN COMMUNITY

"A community that cherishes the little details of love, 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)

5. IN CONSTANT PRAYER

"...holiness consists in a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration." (#147)

Some questions for group reflection:

- Which of Pope Francis five expressions can we identify most in each of the members of our group?
- Which of Pope Francis five expressions can we most, and least, identify with our group as a whole?

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Chapter 5. Spiritual combat, vigilance and discernment

“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.” (#161)

“Those who choose to remain neutral, who are satisfied with little, who renounce the ideal of giving themselves generously to the Lord, will never hold out. Even less if they fall into defeatism, for “if we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents... Christian triumph is always a cross, yet a cross which is at the same time a victorious banner, borne with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil.” (#163)

“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)

“Still, he asks us to examine what is within us – our desires, anxieties, fears and questions – and what takes place all around us – “the signs of the times” – and thus to recognize the paths that lead to complete freedom.” (#168)

“Yet we simply cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer, which enables us better to perceive God’s language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light.” (#171)

“Only if we are prepared to listen, do we have the freedom to set aside our own partial or insufficient ideas, our usual habits and ways of seeing things. In this way, we become truly open to accepting a call that can shatter our security, but lead us to a better life.” (#172)

“For happiness is a paradox.

We experience it most when we accept the mysterious logic that is not of this world.” (#174)

“God asks everything of us, yet he also gives everything to us.

He does not want to enter our lives to cripple or diminish them, but to bring them to fulfilment.” (#175)

Some questions for group reflection:

- Can we identify a period(s) when we have been tempted to:
 - “hatred, desolation, envy and vice” (#161)*
 - “renounce the ideal of giving themselves generously to the Lord” (#163)*
 - “start without confidence” (#163)*
 - “spiritual corruption” (#165)*
- Do we have the skills to guide our group discernment?
- When we take time for discernment where do we see God in *“our desires, anxieties, fears and questions”* and in *“the signs of the times”*?
- How do we feel about Pope Francis statement: *“God asks everything of us, yet he also gives everything to us.” (#175)*?