

Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation "Gaudete et Exsultate" (Rejoice and be glad)

"On the call to holiness in the contemporary world"



1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

An Apostolic Exhortation is considered one of the highest ranking papal documents, after Encyclical Letters.

Pope Francis signed the exhortation March 19, the feast of St. Joseph.

The unveiling of Gaudete et Exsultate ("Rejoice and be glad"), subtitled "On the call to holiness in the contemporary world" was held on April 9, 2018.

The Need and importance of the document:

1. Running at just over 22,000 words, a 100 page booklet, contains many themes the Holy Father has repeated over the past five years: an emphasis on the importance of discernment, warnings against Gnosticism and neo-Pelagianism, rigidity, doing things as they have always been done, an excessive emphasis on doctrine, and gossip.
2. The document is rich in guidance on how to answer the call to holiness in a world filled with distractions, consumerism and hedonism. Frequently, the Pope stresses the importance of prayer and worship, but gives greater emphasis to acts of love and mercy toward one's neighbor, especially the poor and those on the periphery.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Francis's previous Apostolic Exhortations

Pope Francis, 81, has published two previous apostolic exhortations, both of which offered reflections on meetings of the Synod of Bishops.

1. “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (“The Joy of the Gospel”), published in 2013, focused on proclaiming the Gospel in the modern world and included proposals from the 2012 synod on new evangelization.
2. “*Amoris Laetitia*,” (“The Joy of Love”), was released in 2016 and focused on ministry to and with families. It included proposals discussed during sessions of the Synod of Bishops in 2014 and 2015. “This Exhortation is around 20,000 words—less than half the size of “*Amoris Laetitia*”.

Francis has also authored two papal encyclicals: *Lumen Fidei*, which was begun by retired Pope Benedict XVI; and “*Laudato Si*’, *On Care for Our Common Home*,” which focused on environmental issues.

Five years after his election, Pope Francis has issued a long third apostolic exhortation on holiness in today’s world, in which he emphasizes the universal call to sanctity, highlights the pitfalls to achieving it, and recalls that the Christian life is one of constant battle against the devil and the forces of evil.

“*Gaudete et Exsultate*” is the Latin title of the text, which translated into English means “Rejoice and Be Glad.” The words are taken from the Gospel of Matthew (5:12) at the end of the discourse on the Beatitudes.

The line is also known from Psalm 118, which offers thanksgiving to God for God's fidelity and mercifulness. “This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice in it and be glad,” states the psalm.

In its English version, *Gaudete and Exsultate* has 22,064 words and 100 pages. It contains five chapters that include a total of 177 numbered paragraphs and has 125 footnotes. The word “hell” appears exactly once, in n. 115, and not as the place of eternal punishment for the damned but as the origin of what Francis denounces as “verbal violence through the internet and the various forums of digital communication.

2.2 Exhortation on Holiness in the history of the church

The Second Vatican Council devoted the whole of chapter 5 of its dogmatic constitution on the Church, “*Lumen Gentium*” to “the universal call to holiness,” in other words, that everyone is called to be holy, to live a holy life and be a saint.

In April 2013, the head of the Catholic Church again emphasized the concept of a “middle class of holiness” during a homily at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. This phrase was created by another French author, Joseph Malègue (1876-1940). “We can all belong” to that class, the pope insisted.

Even if the faithful sometimes feel weak, fragile and sinful, the Argentine pope said on October 2, 2013, “do not be afraid of holiness, do not be afraid to aim high, to let yourself be loved and purified by God, do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit.”

“Sanctity does not consist especially in doing extraordinary things, but in allowing God to act,” Peter’s Successor continued. Then, he quoted the French mystic Leon Bloy (1846-1917) as he had done during his first Mass as Supreme Pontiff: “The only real sadness in life is not becoming a saint.”

The Church is full of “everyday saints,” said Pope Francis during the general audience of May 14, 2014. These “hidden saints among us” fulfill their duty in their “ordinary daily routine.” They are “fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, citizens. We have many of them! Let us thank the Lord for these Christians who live in hidden holiness.”

During a Wednesday General Audience in Rome’s St. Peter’s Square on Nov. 19, 2014, when he addressed the universal vocation to holiness.

“Sanctity is not something we can procure for ourselves, that we can obtain by our own qualities and abilities,” he said. “Sanctity is a gift, it is a gift granted to us by the Lord Jesus, when He takes us to Himself and clothes us in Himself, He makes us like Him.”

Sanctity, he continued, “is not as a prerogative of the few” but a gift offered to all. To be a saint, the pope said, “there is no need to be bishops, priests or religious,” nor to lead a life dedicated exclusively to prayer.

Everyone is called to sainthood, Francis insisted, regardless of their life status, giving a few examples.

- a) “Are you consecrated? - Be a saint by living out your donation and your ministry with joy,”
- b) Are you married? - Be a saint by loving and taking care of your husband or your wife, as Christ did for the Church.
- c) Are you an unmarried baptized person? - Be a saint by carrying out your work with honesty and competence and by offering time in the service of your brothers and sisters.”

For Peter’s Successor, “there is no need to be bishops, priests or religious” to be holy. Because of their baptism, Christians are “all called to be saints,” he said in another audience at St. Peter’s Square on November 19, 2014 during the year of consecrated life.

At a general audience on June 21, 2017, the Bishop of Rome declared that the Christian life was “not an unattainable ideal.”

On April 9, 2018, an eye opening statement of Pope Francis in his document, “The only real sadness in life is not becoming a saint.”

Where is the problem?

He goes on to warn against “spiritual corruption,” which he describes as a “comfortable and self-satisfied form of blindness” where all appears acceptable: “deception, slander, egotism and other subtle forms of self-centredness, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”

The battle is not just against “the world and a worldly mentality” or “human weakness,” but “a constant struggle against the devil.”

What is the solution?

The Lord has given us “powerful weapons” to fight the devil such as “faith-filled prayer, meditation on the word of God, the celebration of Mass, Eucharistic adoration, sacramental reconciliation, works of charity, community life, missionary outreach.”

3. CHAPTERIZATION

Introduction (§§1-2)

Chapter 1 (§§3-34): The Call to Holiness

Chapter 2 (§§35-62): Two Subtle Enemies of Holiness

Chapter 3 (§§63-109): In the Light of the Master

Chapter 4 (§§110-157): Signs of Holiness in Today’s World

Chapter 5 (§§158-201): Spiritual Combat, Vigilance, and Discernment

Conclusion (§§176-177) with Hail Mary

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Much of the document was written in the second person, speaking directly to the individual reading it. "With this exhortation I would like to insist primarily on the call to holiness that the Lord addresses to each of us, the call that He also addresses, personally, to you," he wrote near the beginning.

Saying he was not writing a theological treatise on holiness, Pope Francis focused mainly on how the call to holiness is a personal call, something God asks of each Christian and which requires a personal response given one's state in life, talents and circumstances.

5. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Some inspiring quotes from the Holy Father:

1 Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23). In being poor of heart, meekness and humility, knowing how to mourn with others, yearning for righteousness, keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love, sowing peace, and accepting the path of slander and lies are the modern persecution of today.

2 He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence.” §1. “The saints surprise us; they confound us, because by their lives they urge us to abandon a dull and dreary mediocrity.”

3 Every saint is a message §21 He quotes the late Jesuit Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini and the

Swiss theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar in the text, but also draws on the example of many saints, including St. Bonaventure, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Anthony of Padua, and singles out women saints such as St. Hildegard of Bingen, St Bridget and St. Catherine of Siena.

4 “Our life is essentially a gift. §5. “There is a hierarchy of theological virtues §60. We will have to endure suffering for the Gospel’s sake.§92

5 “Those who really wish to give glory to God by their lives, who truly long to grow in holiness§107. I do not believe in holiness without prayer,” Eucharist and reconciliation, are essential supports for living a holy life. Being holy is not easy.

6 Humility can humiliations and lead to holiness.” §118

7 “The Christian life is a constant battle. §158.

8 “When, in God’s presence, we examine our life’s journey, no areas can be off limits.” §175

9 “Mary our Mother is our model for holiness”.§176

10 Charity is the heart of holiness. “I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God’s people. “The saints do not waste energy complaining about the failings of others.

11 “Holiness is the most attractive face of the church.” In history, women were most ignored or overlooked but Holy Spirit raised up saints and holy men and women reformed the society.

12 “Christian joy is usually accompanied by a sense of humor.”

13 God calls all Christians to be saints -- not plastic statues of saints, but real people who make time for prayer and who show loving care for others in the simplest gestures. Holiness is not restricted to those who “spend much time in prayer.

14 “Anything done out of anxiety, pride or the need to impress others will not lead to holiness." The saints are not odd and aloof, unbearable because of their vanity, negativity and bitterness,"

15 The exhortation included many of Pope Francis' familiar refrains about attitudes that destroy the Christian community, like gossip, or pride

16 Holiness "is not about swooning in mystic rapture," but it is about recognizing and serving the Lord in the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the poor and the sick.

17 Holiness is holistic, and while each person has a special mission, no one should claim that their particular call or path is the only worthy one.

18 And, one cannot claim that defending the life of a migrant is a "secondary issue" when compared to abortion or other bioethical questions. Fighting social injustice as important as fighting abortion.

- 19 Saints, on the other hand, "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."
- 20 Holiness is shown through patience, such as parents who raise their children "with immense love" or "work hard" to support their families.
- 21 Besides making the point that holiness exists "even outside the Catholic Church,"
- 22 Holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full.
- 23 He notes the constant distractions of "new gadgets," travel and consumerism, asking how we can "stop this rat race" and recover the personal space for "heartfelt dialogue with God."
- 24 He highlights two "subtle enemies" of sanctity — Gnosticism and pelagianism.
- 25 The Pope underlines the importance of imitating the Good Samaritan, but warns against ideologies such as those which view some social-justice work "as superficial, worldly, secular, materialist, communist or populist."
- 26 "Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate," he says. "Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection."
- 27 Again, the Pope stresses the importance of acts of mercy, saying that although "primacy belongs to our relationship with God," one should not "forget that the ultimate criterion on which our lives will be judged is what we have done for others."
- 28 He also warns against "hedonism and consumerism," which "can prove our downfall" and lead to our being "too concerned about ourselves and our rights." The answer, he says, is to "cultivate a certain simplicity of life, resisting the feverish demands of a consumer society."
- 29 He lists five "great expressions" of love for God and neighbor that will make us "genuinely happy" as perseverance, patience and meekness; joy and a sense of humor; boldness and passion; being in community; and constant prayer.
30. The exhortation ends with a section on "discernment," which is a gift to be requested of the Holy Spirit and developed through prayer, reflection, reading Scripture and seeking counsel from a trusted spiritual guide. "A sincere daily 'examination of conscience'" will help.

CONCLUSION

Gaudete et exsultate addresses the theme of holiness. Holy Father challenges everyone one by one by throwing a reflection that "The only real sadness in life is not becoming a saint."

Truly, it's written in love.

Therefore, the new Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis is a guide to Christianity for the 21st Century.

Joseph Santiago, cmf