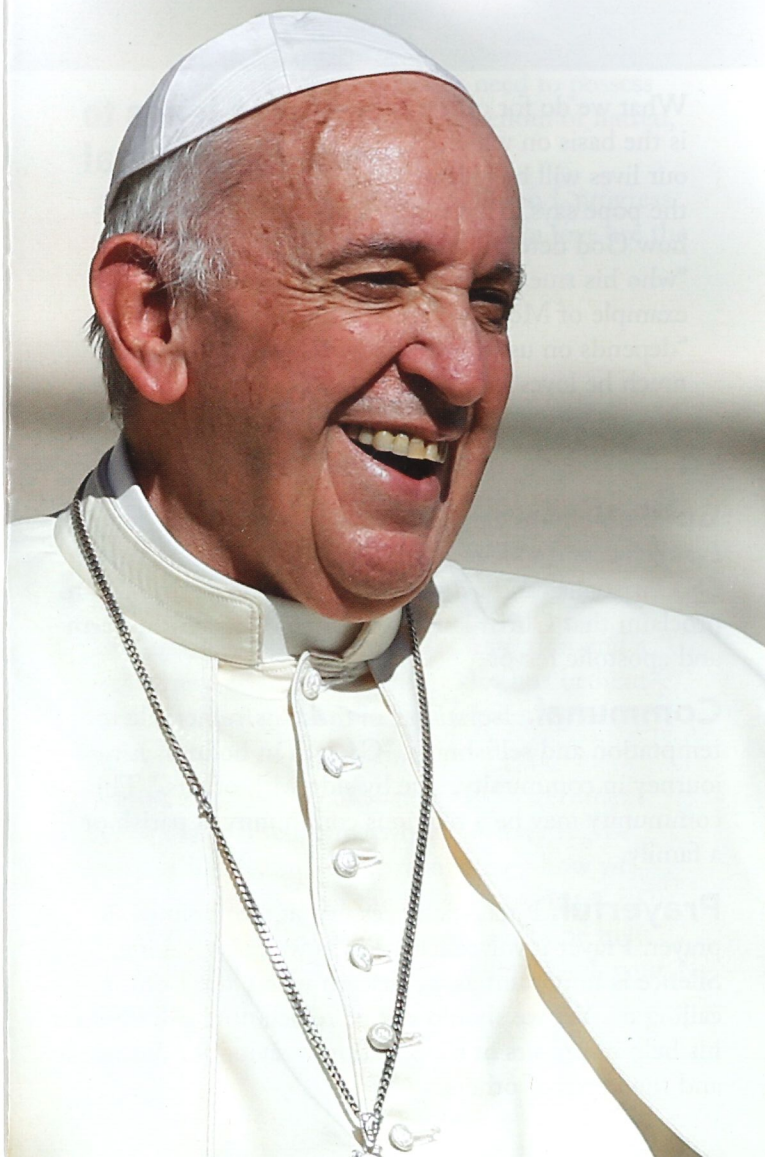


APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

Rejoice and Be Glad!

THE CALL TO HOLINESS



Is holiness impossible for most of us?

Are just saints, and maybe some priests, called to be holy?

Do we ever think that being holy can make us happy?

We live in a world that promises excitement and distraction. We may think that holiness is out of reach, and perhaps out of touch as well.

Pope Francis disagrees. Holiness is a spiritual adventure that comes with “risks, challenges and opportunities” and leads to true joy and real happiness.

In his new apostolic exhortation, *Rejoice and Be Glad* (*Gaudete et Exsultate*), Pope Francis shares the practical wisdom of the Church and its saints, challenging us not to settle for getting by and playing it safe. Instead, he says, each of us is called to be holy.

Our Daily Lives

“We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer.” The Holy Father insists that this is not the case. “We are called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves.”

“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 laboring 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.”

“The only great tragedy in life is not to become a saint.”

León Bloy

Holiness “will grow with small gestures,” Pope Francis counsels us: an avoidance of gossip, a patient act of kindness, a prayer for faith during a difficult time.

For every Christian, our mission on earth is to discover our path to holiness. Seeking God’s will for us, discerning his call and responding to it with an open and generous heart is how we attain holiness. While real happiness comes from fulfilling our mission, it is not necessarily easy: “You cannot grow in holiness without committing yourself, body and soul, to giving your best to this endeavor.”

False Forms of Holiness

Pope Francis identifies two “false forms of holiness.” They are ancient heresies that return from age to age.

Gnosticism is an attitude where we may believe that “because we know something, or are able to explain it in certain terms, we are already saints, perfect and better than the ‘ignorant masses.’” Pope Francis warns, “When somebody has an answer for every question, it is a sign that they are not on the right road.”

Pelagianism is where some people, although they speak of God’s grace, “ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules.” Instead, “the Church has repeatedly taught that we are justified not by our own works or efforts, but by the grace of the Lord, who always takes the initiative.”

For Pope Francis, “once we believe that everything depends on human effort as channeled 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.”

The Path of Holiness

The Beatitudes are listed in the Gospels of Matthew (5:3-12) and Luke (6:20-23). Pope Francis calls them “a Christian’s identity card.” They illuminate the path of holiness for each of us. In the exhortation, Pope Francis builds on the meaning of each Beatitude.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. “Wealth ensures nothing.” Luke “invites us to live a plain and austere life,” sharing with “those most in need.”

Blessed are the meek. “If we regard the faults and limitations of others with tenderness and meekness . . . we can actually help them.”

Blessed are those who mourn. “Knowing how to mourn with others: that is holiness.”

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. “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.”

Blessed are the merciful. “Mercy has two aspects. It involves giving, helping and serving others, but it also includes forgiveness and understanding.”

Blessed are the pure in heart. “There can be no love without works of love but . . . the Lord expects a commitment to our brothers and sisters that comes from the heart.”

Blessed are the peacemakers. Peacemaking is not just about wars but about avoiding doing injury to others with gossip or calumny. “We need to be artisans of peace.” “It is hard work; it calls for great openness of mind and heart.”

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Persecutions are happening today, sometimes involving the shedding of blood, but sometimes from “slander and lies.”

Seeing Christ in Others

The Beatitudes are challenging. “We can only practice them if the Holy Spirit fills us with his power and frees us from our weakness, our selfishness, our complacency and our pride.”

The pope says, “mercy is the beating heart of the Gospel.” We are asked to help the suffering individual but also to seek social change that will restore “just social and economic systems.”

This desire for change can lead us to two different errors. The first is to treat Christianity like some sort of aid organization, ignoring that we are called to a personal relationship with God and not just a social agenda.

The second error is to distrust social engagement as too worldly or to focus on only one issue at the expense of many others. The pope reminds Catholics, for example, that our defense of the unborn must be “clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life.” “Equally sacred,” however, are the lives of the poor, the infirm, the elderly, the migrant and refugee.

Five Signs of Holiness

Pope Francis identifies five signs of holiness, calling them “five great expressions of love for God and neighbor.”

Grounded. Being solidly grounded in God gives us the inner strength to be a steady “witness of holiness through patience and constancy in doing good.” We must resist the temptation to respond to evil with evil, and the pope warns against the verbal violence of the Internet and social media.

Joyful. Supernatural joy is mentioned often in Scripture. And St. Thomas Aquinas said, “the necessary result of the love of charity is joy.” This joy is often accompanied by a sense of humor, and the pope recalls a prayer by St. Thomas More: “Grant me, O Lord, a sense of good humor.”



What we do for others is the basis on which our lives will be judged, the pope says. Mercy is how God determines “who his true children are.” Pope Francis cites the example of Mother Teresa, who said that God “depends on us to love the world and to show how much he loves it.”

Holiness leads to true joy and real happiness.

Bold. Holiness can lead to boldness, “an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world.” A danger for Christians can be a “lack of fervor.” We are called to proclaim that Christ is Lord with boldness, enthusiasm and apostolic fervor.

Communal. Isolation can make us vulnerable to temptation and selfishness. “Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others.” This community may be a religious community, a parish or a family.

Prayerful. Finally, a necessary sign of holiness is prayer. Prayer involves listening as well as speaking. Silence is important as we discern where the Lord is calling us. Yet we should not be reluctant to ask God for his help in prayers of supplication, praying for our needs and the needs of others.

Snares of the Devil

Pursuing holiness is not without challenges. Pope Francis warns us that “the Christian life is a constant battle. We need strength and courage to withstand the temptations of the devil and to proclaim the Gospel.”

Our challenges come from the world, from a “worldly mentality that would deceive us and leave us dull and mediocre, and from our own failings and weaknesses.” But at its core our struggle is with the devil. Pope Francis makes it clear that the devil is not “a myth, a representation, a symbol, a figure of speech or an idea.” Not to see him as a real foe can cause us to grow careless and let down our guard. “The devil does not need to possess us. He poisons us with the venom of hatred, desolation, envy and vice.”

“The cultivation of all that is good, progress in the spiritual life and growth in love are the best counterbalance to evil.”

Discernment

To pursue holiness and to avoid the allures of the devil, we need to discern God’s path for us. Discernment is a grace, a gift of spiritual wisdom we seek from God to better recognize his will as well as to avoid temptations or false paths.

Discernment calls for prayerful reflection and a willingness to listen. We must also be obedient to the Gospel and to the teaching authority of the Church.

Ultimately, Pope Francis tells us, “discernment is not about discovering what more we can get out of this life, but about recognizing how we can better accomplish the mission entrusted to us at our baptism.” And that mission is to be holy. As St. Paul wrote: “This is the will of God, your holiness” (1 Thes 4:3).