



## Fourth Sunday of Easter B

April 22, 2018

### **Pope Francis, in his most recent Apostolic Exhortation, calls all of us to a life of holiness**

On April 9, 2018, Pope Francis issued an *Apostolic Exhortation* called *Gaudete et Exsultate* (“Rejoice and be Glad”). In his introduction, the Pope states that his “modest goal” is to repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our time. The following are some excerpts from Chapter One of the 104-page document.

#### **The Saints who encourage and accompany us**

*The Letter to the Hebrews presents a number of testimonies that encourage us to “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (12:1). It speaks of Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Gideon and others (cf. 11:1-12:3). Above all, it invites us to realize that “a great cloud of witnesses” (12:1) impels us to advance constantly towards the goal. These witnesses may include our own mothers, grandmothers or other loved ones (cf. 2Tim 1:5). 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. (para.3)*

#### **The Saints “Next Door”**

In paras.6-9, the Pope speaks about holiness found in the lives of ordinary people. In para.7, he writes:

*I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God’s people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence. We might call them “the middle class of holiness.”*

**Each, in his or her own way, needs to find a path to holiness**

*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. We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness. (para.11)*

*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. (para.14)*

#### **A simple example of how we can move along the path of holiness**

*This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures. Here is an example: a woman goes shopping, she meets a neighbour and they begin to speak, and the gossip starts. But she says in her heart: “No, I will not speak badly of anyone.” This is a step forward in holiness. Later at home, one of her children wants to talk to her about his hopes and dreams, and even though she is tired, she sits down and listens with patience and love. That is another sacrifice that brings holiness. Later she experiences some anxiety, but recalling the love of the Virgin Mary, she takes her rosary and prays with faith. Yet another path of holiness. Later still, she goes out onto the street, encounters a poor person and stops to say a kind word to him. One more step. (para.16)*

In para.17, Francis refers to the saintly life of a Vietnamese Cardinal:

*When Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyễn van Thuân was imprisoned, he refused to waste time waiting for the day he would be set free. Instead, he chose “to live the present moment, filling it to the brim with love.” He decided: “I will seize the occasions that present themselves every day; I will accomplish ordinary actions in an extraordinary way.”*

*This is a powerful summons to all of us. You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission. Try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognizing the signs that he gives you. 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. Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today’s world. (para.23)*

### **Integrating Prayer and Actions (paras.25-34)**

*It is not healthy to love silence while fleeing interaction with others, to want peace and quiet while avoiding activity, to seek prayer while disdain 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. (para, 26)*

*This does not mean ignoring the need for moments of quiet, solitude and silence before God. Quite the contrary. The presence of constantly new gadgets, the excitement of travel and an endless array of consumer goods at times leave no room for God’s voice to be heard. 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. This may not happen unless “we see ourselves staring into the abyss of a frightful temptation, or have the dizzying sensation of standing on the precipice of utter despair, or find ourselves completely alone and abandoned.” In such situations, we find the deepest motivation for living fully our commitment to our work. (para.29)*

*The same distractions that are omnipresent in today’s world also make us tend to absolutize our free time, so*

*that we can give ourselves over completely to the devices that provide us with entertainment or ephemeral pleasures. As a result, we come to resent our mission, our commitment grows slack, and our generous and ready spirit of service begins to flag. This denatures our spiritual experience. Can any spiritual fervour be sound when it dwells alongside sloth in evangelization or in service to others? (para.30)*

*We need a spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelizing efforts, so that every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord’s eyes. In this way, every minute of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness. (para.31)*

### **Pope Francis concludes Chapter One with this exhortation:**

*Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace. For in the words of Léon Bloy, when all is said and done, “the only great tragedy in life is not to become a saint.” (para.34)*

#### **Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel**

**Saint Michael the Archangel,  
defend us in battle,  
be our protection against the malice  
and snares of the devil.  
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray;  
and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly host,  
by the power of God, thrust into hell  
Satan and all evil spirits  
who wander through the world  
seeking the ruin of souls.  
Amen.**

Have a blessed week,

