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"The joy of the Gospel can be renewed every day"

In his 27 November general audience, Pope Francis continued catechetical cycle on how the Holy Spirit guides the People of God through salvation history, speaking about joy.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

After speaking about sanctifying grace and then charisms, today I

would like to take a look at a third reality. The first, sanctifying grace; second, charisms; and what is the third? A reality linked to the action of the Holy Spirit: the “fruits of the Spirit”. Something strange. What is the fruit of the Spirit? Saint Paul offers a list of them in the Letter to the Galatians. He writes this, listen carefully: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (5:22). Nine: these are the “fruits of the Spirit”. But what is this “fruit of the Spirit”?

Unlike the charisms, which the Spirit gives to whom He wants and when He wants for the good of the Church, the *fruits* of the Spirit, I repeat - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – are the result of cooperation between grace and our freedom. These fruits always express the creativity of the person, in which

“faith works through love” (cf. *Gal* 5:6), sometimes in a surprising and joyful way. Not everyone in the Church can be an apostle, not everyone can be a prophet, not everyone can be an evangelist, not everyone; but all of us, without distinction, can and must be charitable, patient, humble workers for peace, and so on. But all of us, yes, must be charitable, must be patient, must be humble, workers for peace and not war.

Among the fruits of the Spirit listed by the Apostle, I like to highlight one of them, recalling the initial words of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Jesus joy is constantly born anew” (no. 1). There will be sad moments at times, but

there is always peace. With Jesus there is joy and peace.

Joy, fruit of the Spirit, has in common with any other human joy a certain feeling of fullness and fulfilment, which makes one wish it would last forever. We know from experience, however, that this is not the case, because everything here passes quickly. Everything passes quickly. Let us think together: youth, youthfulness – it passes quickly; health, strength, well-being, friendships, loves... They last a hundred years, but then... no more. They soon pass. Besides, even if these things do not pass quickly, after a while they are no longer enough, or even become boring, because, as Saint Augustine said to God: “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You” (*Confessions*, I, 1). There is the restlessness of the heart to seek beauty, peace, love, joy.

The joy of the Gospel, evangelical joy, unlike any other joy, can be renewed every day and become contagious.

“Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. ...

Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?”

(*Evangelii Gaudium*, 8). It is the dual characteristic of joy as fruit of the Spirit: not only is it not subject to the inevitable wear of time, but it multiplies when it is shared with others! A true joy is shared with others; it even spreads.

Five centuries ago, a saint called Philip Neri lived in Rome – here in Rome. He has passed into history as the saint of joy. Listen to this

carefully: the saint of joy. He used to say to the poor and abandoned children of his Oratory: “My children, be cheerful; I do not want qualms or melancholy; it is enough for me that you do not sin”. And again: “Be good, if you can!”. Less well known, however, is the source from which his joy came. Saint Philip Neri had such love for God that at times it seemed his heart might burst in his chest. His joy was, in the fullest sense, a fruit of the Spirit. The Saint participated in the Jubilee of 1575, which he enriched with the practice, maintained thereafter, of the visit to the Seven Churches. He was, in his time, a true evangelizer through joy. And he had this, like Jesus who always forgave, who forgave everything. Perhaps some of us might think: “But I have committed this sin, and this will not be forgiven...”. Listen to this carefully. God forgives everything, God always forgives. And this is joy: being

forgiven by God. And I always say to priests and confessors: “Forgive everything, do not ask too many questions; but forgive everything, everything, and always”.

The word “Gospel” means glad tidings. Therefore, it cannot be communicated with a long face and sombre countenance, but with the joy of those who have found the hidden treasure and the precious pearl. Remember Saint Paul’s exhortation to the believers of the Church of Philippi, which he now addresses to us all, and which we heard at the beginning: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near” (*Phil 4:4-5*).

Dear brothers and sisters, be glad, with the joy of Jesus in our heart. Thank you.

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