

Pope Francis' modest goal

On Monday 9th April, 2018, the Vatican published an Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Francis on "The Call to Holiness in Today's World". The 46-page document takes its Latin name, "Gaudete et Exsultate", from the opening words, "Rejoice and be glad!" -- a quotation from St Matthew's Gospel (5:12).

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The following Q&A with Jack Valero about the Exhortation was

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Why did the Pope write this Exhortation, and why now?

Helping people to be holy is one of the Church's main tasks in every era. The Second Vatican Council spoke of the "universal call to holiness". Pope Francis has written not an academic or doctrinal text, but an apostolic exhortation whose goal is "to repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time." It is an invitation to a journey that takes place in the concrete here and now of our daily lives, in small gestures and little things, in which we are led more and more by God's grace.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis spoke of the call to all the faithful to be missionary disciples; *Gaudete et Exsultate* is about the mission at the heart of that call, which is to be in

relationship with Jesus Christ, who stirs our desire for holiness and enables us, by his power rather than ours, to get there. Holiness is for all of us, not a select few. He wants us to know that it is our destiny; it's what God has planned for us; and yet there is nothing intimidating or overpowering about it; rather it is a liberation, a way of becoming who we really are.

What is new about *Gaudete et Exsultate*?

St John Paul II and Benedict XVI spoke often about the universal call to holiness, with the former in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 30-31 inviting the Church's pastoral planning to include a "training in holiness", above all in the art of prayer.

Gaudete et Exsultate is addressed *personally* to each and every one of us, whatever our state in life or level of education or development. Pope

Francis often uses the informal singular expression *tu* (in Latin languages), which is how we speak one at a time to friends and family. So Francis is extending a *personal* invitation to follow Christ.

Second, it is deliberately *lay* in its language and invitation, aimed at people who live in the world, who have jobs and families and busy lives with many different pressures. Pope Francis wants people to know that they need no special education or qualifications, nor to take religious vows: just an open heart and a desire to spend some time with the Lord in prayer and by reading the Gospel. He also wants people to know that the Church has everything they need to become holy, and it is all available to them.

Third, the pope shows us, in very *practical* ways, how the journey to holiness is undertaken, and how it

makes us more alive and more human.

How does he suggest people will become holy?

Much of what Pope Francis suggests is well known in Catholic life: to make time for prayer, to frequent the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confession, to do a daily examination of conscience, and to read the Gospel regularly, so that Christ's life and ours become ever more closely identified. But he makes a very strong connection between these "spiritual" activities and *actions rooted in mercy*. In fact, he says they cannot be separated, and the authenticity of our prayer will be shown in how we become and act more humbly and more mercifully. This is rooted in Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus offers a very clear path to holiness in the Beatitudes in Chapter 5. Then in Chapter 25 we

find the “one clear criterion on which we will be judged” at the end of time, namely how we have responded to the concrete needs of others, especially the poor. There is no holiness without this. It involves believing, praying and doing in ways that can’t be separated.

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