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Apostolic Exhortation "Gaudete et exsultate"

Pope Francis has written at length about the universal call to holiness in the Church: "to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect."

04/09/2018

eBook of the exhortation can be downloaded in the links below:

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Some excerpts from the apostolic exhortation are found below.

1. “REJOICE AND BE GLAD” (*Mt* 5:12), Jesus tells those persecuted or humiliated for his sake. The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence. The call to holiness is present in various ways from the very first pages of the Bible. We see it expressed in the Lord’s words to Abraham: “Walk before me, and be blameless” (*Gen* 17:1).

5. The processes of beatification and canonization recognize the signs of heroic virtue, the sacrifice of one’s life in martyrdom, and certain cases

where a life is constantly offered for others, even until death...

10. ...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: “Be holy, for I am holy” (*Lev 11:44*; cf. *1 Pet 1:16*). The Second Vatican Council stated this clearly: “Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord – each in his or her own way – to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect.”[10]

14. To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. 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.

15. Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to him in every situation. Do not be dismayed, for the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (cf. *Gal* 5:22-23). When you feel the temptation to dwell on your own weakness, raise your eyes to Christ crucified and say: “Lord, I am a poor sinner, but you can work the miracle of making me a little bit better”. In the Church, holy yet made up of sinners, you will find everything you need to grow towards holiness. The Lord has bestowed on the Church the gifts of scripture, the sacraments, holy places, living communities, the witness of the saints and a multifaceted beauty that proceeds

from God's love, "like a bride bedecked with jewels" (*Is 61:10*).

19. A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness, for "this is the will of God, your sanctification" (*1 Thess 4:3*). Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel.

20. That mission has its fullest meaning in Christ, and can only be understood through him. At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord's death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him. But it can also entail reproducing in our own lives various aspects of Jesus' earthly life: his hidden life, his life in community, his closeness to the

outcast, his poverty and other ways in which he showed his self-sacrificing love. The contemplation of these mysteries, as Saint Ignatius of Loyola pointed out, leads us to incarnate them in our choices and attitudes.[18] Because “everything in Jesus’ life was a sign of his mystery”,[19] “Christ’s whole life is a revelation of the Father”,[20] “Christ’s whole life is a mystery of redemption”,[21] “Christ’s whole life is a mystery of recapitulation”.[22] “Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us.”[23]

21. The Father’s plan is Christ, and ourselves in him. In the end, it is Christ who loves in us, for “holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full.”[24] As a result, “the measure of our holiness stems from the stature that Christ achieves in us, to the extent that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life

on his.”[25] Every saint is a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people.

34. 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 León Bloy, when all is said and done, “the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.”[32]

63. ...The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card. So if anyone asks: “What must one do to be a good Christian?”, the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount.[66] In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which

we are called to reflect in our daily lives.

64. The word “happy” or “blessed” thus becomes a synonym for “holy.” It expresses the fact that those faithful to God and his word, by their self-giving, gain true happiness...

74. Meekness is yet another expression of the interior poverty of those who put their trust in God alone. Indeed, in the Bible the same word – *anawim* – usually refers both to the poor and to the meek.

Someone might object: “If I am that meek, they will think that I am an idiot, a fool or a weakling.” At times they may, but so be it. It is always better to be meek, for then our deepest desires will be fulfilled. The meek “shall inherit the earth”, for they will see God’s promises accomplished in their lives. In every situation, the meek put their hope in the Lord, and those who hope for

him shall possess the land... and enjoy the fullness of peace (cf. *Ps* 37:9.11). For his part, the Lord trusts in them: “This is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word” (*Is* 66:2).

Reacting with meekness and humility: that is holiness.

86. A heart that loves God and neighbour (cf. *Mt* 22:36-40), genuinely and not merely in words, is a pure heart; it can see God. In his hymn to charity, Saint Paul says that “now we see in a mirror, dimly” (*1 Cor* 13:12), but to the extent that truth and love prevail, we will then be able to see “face to face.” Jesus promises that those who are pure in heart “will see God”.

Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love: that is holiness.

95. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel (vv. 31-46), Jesus expands on the Beatitude that calls the merciful blessed. If we seek the holiness pleasing to God's eyes, this text offers us one clear criterion on which we will be judged. "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (vv. 35-36).

In fidelity to the Master

96. Holiness, then, is not about swooning in mystic rapture. As Saint John Paul II said: "If we truly start out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified."[79] The text of Matthew 25:35-36 is "not a simple invitation to

charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ.”[80] In this call to recognize him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to imitate

118. Humility can only take root in the heart through humiliations. Without them, there is no humility or holiness. If you are unable to suffer and offer up a few humiliations, you are not humble and you are not on the path to holiness. The holiness that God bestows on his Church comes through the humiliation of his Son. He is the way. Humiliation makes you resemble Jesus; it is an unavoidable aspect of the imitation of Christ. For “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21). In turn, he reveals the humility of the Father, who condescends to

journey with his people, enduring their infidelities and complaints (cf. *Ex* 34:6-9; *Wis* 11:23-12:2; *Lk* 6:36). For this reason, the Apostles, after suffering humiliation, rejoiced “that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for [Jesus’] name” (*Acts* 5:41).

119. Here I am not speaking only about stark situations of martyrdom, but about the daily humiliations of those who keep silent to save their families, who prefer to praise others rather than boast about themselves, or who choose the less welcome tasks, at times even choosing to bear an injustice so as to offer it to the Lord. “If when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval” (*1 Pet* 2:20). This does not mean walking around with eyes lowered, not saying a word and fleeing the company of others. At times, precisely because someone is free of selfishness, he or she can dare

to disagree gently, to demand justice or to defend the weak before the powerful, even if it may harm his or her reputation.

122. Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the saints are joyful and full of good humour. Though completely realistic, they radiate a positive and hopeful spirit. The Christian life is “joy in the Holy Spirit” (*Rom 14:17*), for “the necessary result of the love of charity is joy; since every lover rejoices at being united to the beloved... the effect of charity is joy.”^[99] Having received the beautiful gift of God’s word, we embrace it “in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit” (*1 Thess 1:6*). If we allow the Lord to draw us out of our shell and change our lives, then we can do as Saint Paul tells us: “Rejoice in the Lord always; I say it again, rejoice!” (*Phil 4:4*).

139. Let us ask the Lord for the grace not to hesitate when the Spirit calls us to take a step forward. Let us ask for the apostolic courage to share the Gospel with others and to stop trying to make our Christian life a museum of memories. In every situation, may the Holy Spirit cause us to contemplate history in the light of the risen Jesus. In this way, the Church will not stand still, but constantly welcome the Lord's surprises.

147. Finally, though it may seem obvious, we should remember that holiness consists in a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration. The saints are distinguished by a spirit of prayer and a need for communion with God. They find an exclusive concern with this world to be narrow and stifling, and, amid their own concerns and commitments, they long for God,

losing themselves in praise and contemplation of the Lord. I do not believe in holiness without prayer, even though that prayer need not be lengthy or involve intense emotions.

148. Saint John of the Cross tells us: “Endeavour to remain always in the presence of God, either real, imaginative, or unitive, insofar as is permitted by your works.”[109] In the end, our desire for God will surely find expression in our daily lives: “Try to be continuous in prayer, and in the midst of bodily exercises do not leave it. Whether you eat, drink, talk with others, or do anything, always go to God and attach your heart to him.”[110]

151. We need to remember that “contemplation of the face of Jesus, died and risen, restores our humanity, even when it has been broken by the troubles of this life or marred by sin. We must not

domesticate the power of the face of Christ.” [113] So let me ask you: Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord’s presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze? Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let him warm you more and more with his love and tenderness, you will not catch fire. How will you then be able to set the hearts of others on fire by your words and witness? If, gazing on the face of Christ, you feel unable to let yourself be healed and transformed, then enter into the Lord’s heart, into his wounds, for that is the abode of divine mercy. [114]

158. The Christian life is a constant battle. We need strength and courage to withstand the temptations of the devil and to proclaim the Gospel. This battle is sweet, for it allows us to

rejoice each time the Lord triumphs in our lives.

159. We are not dealing merely with a battle against the world and a worldly mentality that would deceive us and leave us dull and mediocre, lacking in enthusiasm and joy. Nor can this battle be reduced to the struggle against our human weaknesses and proclivities (be they laziness, lust, envy, jealousy or any others). It is also a constant struggle against the devil, the prince of evil. Jesus himself celebrates our victories. He rejoiced when his disciples made progress in preaching the Gospel and overcoming the opposition of the evil one: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (*Lk 10:18*).

177. It is my hope that these pages will prove helpful by enabling the whole Church to devote herself anew to promoting the desire for holiness.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us a fervent longing to be saints for God's greater glory, and let us encourage one another in this effort. In this way, we will share a happiness that the world will not be able to take from us.

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