



Office for
Evangelisation

CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF
BROKEN BAY



A discussion guide for small groups

Gaudete et Exsultate



*Rejoice
and
be glad*

HOW TO USE THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

This discussion guide is intended as a companion to the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad).

Corresponding to the format of *Gaudete et Exsultate*, the guide is comprised of five sessions which include a summary of the content of each of the five chapters, as well as guided questions to prompt group reflection and discussion. Each session also includes a space for journaling.

The Guide has been designed to be used for a 1.5 hour session, though it can be adapted as desired by selecting more or fewer questions to be discussed.

The Guide is available to be printed as an A4 booklet, or each session can be printed individually (4 pages per session).

All are encouraged to read the appropriate chapter of the Apostolic Exhortation prior to undertaking the session, though this is not necessary. The document can be found at <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html> under 'Apostolic Exhortations'.

You may wish to use music at the start of your session, or during the journaling time. Some suggested songs are:

- Refiner's Fire, *Brian Doerksen*
- Revelation Song, *Phillips, Craig & Dean (or Kari Jobe)*
- The Beatitudes, *Hillsong*
- Good Good Father, *Chris Tomlin*
- Lord I Need You, *Matt Maher*

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Tel: (02) 8379 1600

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Writing: Pina Bernard, Dr Cristina Gomez

Design: Cyrilla Almeida

Images: Shutterstock image pages - Cover, 3, 5.
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Langfield, 16-John Price, 17-Sarah Noltner,
19-Mishal Ibrahim, 20-Bruno van der Kraan.

Enquiries: Catholic Life & Faith Formation 8379 1627

Email: faith.formation@bbcatholic.org.au



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**CATHOLIC
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1

The Call to Holiness

REPROPOSING HOLINESS FOR EACH OF US

Holiness may seem like something that only very few people strive for or obtain, perhaps the Saints, Popes, Clergy or Religious, and some exceptional individuals who express an exemplary goodness. But Pope Francis tells us that holiness is something that every person should work towards, and that with the grace of God, all can grow in.

Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad) is the Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Francis on the Call to Holiness in Today's World. Issued in March 2018, it repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our time, and for every person.



Reflect on the opening words of *Gaudete et Exsultate* below. Read slowly, and underline a word or phrase that stands out for you. What might Pope Francis mean by this word or phrase you have selected? What does it mean to you? What do you understand by holiness? After a quiet time of reflection, share with the group.

“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. ...

My modest goal is to repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities. For the Lord has chosen each one of us “to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1:4).



OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, as we begin this reflection on holiness, give us new insights into ways of living our lives that lead to a fullness of life. Jesus, you showed us with your words and actions what a holy life looks like. Give each of us the courage to follow your way. Holy Spirit, flow through us and bring renewal and newness to our faith lives so that we can grow in holiness and be the people we were created to be. Amen.

SAINTS “NEXT DOOR”

We are familiar with the many Saints who have gone before us and have been witnesses to holiness in the course of their lives. We must remember, though, that through the Holy Spirit, there is an abundance of holiness among all God's faithful people. This can be seen, for example, in the daily patience and perseverance of parents raising their children with love; people who work hard to support their families; the sick who struggle daily; and elderly Religious who remain joyful. Holiness is found in those ‘next door’ who witness to God and who reflect God's presence. These have been called the “middle class of holiness” (GE,7).

Q. Can you name one person in your life in whom you can see threads of holiness through their perseverance in the struggles of daily life?

THE PERSONAL CALL TO HOLINESS ADDRESSED TO YOU

With this Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis seeks to focus specifically on the personal call to holiness that the Lord addresses to each one of us. As stated in the Vatican II documents, **“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.”**

(*Lumen Gentium*, 11)

The important thing to note is that each person attains holiness in his or her own way. Whilst it is good to be inspired by the holiness we see in others, we shouldn't simply try to copy them. Rather, we need to discern our own unique path, so that we bring out the best in ourselves rather than imitate something not meant for us.

Our own holiness is borne out by "living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves" (*GE, 14*). In whatever situation we are in, we are called to be holy, and Pope Francis seeks to give us some practical examples: in the way we care for each other in marriage; in the joyful living of a religious commitment; in our integrity in our work; in leading children to Jesus as parents or grandparents.



It is often in small steps that we make progress on the path of holiness: in refusing to gossip; in that extra patience required with a child; in the kind encounter with a person in need. It may be doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way with great love. We work at holiness step-by-step.

We are holy only because we share in God's holiness. It is God's grace that makes us capable of holiness. The grace of our Baptism and the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in us, and the Church gives us all we need to sustain us on this path, including the Scriptures and the Sacraments. Further, we are helped in our human weakness by the very life of the risen Jesus which he shares with us, leading us towards holiness even in our human weakness.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

- Q. Do you feel that you are on a path of holiness? What does this look like in your life?
- Q. Can you identify little steps in your life that are leading you to holiness? Can you name a situation / activity in your life through which you feel that you are growing in holiness?
- Q. Are there any situations in your life that you could approach with greater love?
- Q. Are you able to draw on God's grace in your everyday situations? How do you do this?

YOUR MISSION IN CHRIST

"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 ... leads us to incarnate them in our choices and attitudes" (*GE, 20*).

We are holy when we model our life on Christ, when we reflect Christ. This involves living as he did on earth with compassion and self-giving, and participating in our own dying and rising experiences which form the pattern of the Christian life. Pope Francis tells us that "***The Father's plan is Christ, and ourselves in him***" (*GE, 21*). The whole of our life, therefore, becomes a mission as we are called to go out to reflect Jesus in today's world.



It is a personal summons: God wishes to speak to the world by your life and this requires firstly to listen to God to discern what this message is that you are to bring. What does Jesus expect in every moment, in every decision, so that you are able to live this mission that you have received?

Our identification with Christ necessarily involves our identification with his own mission to build the kingdom of God, a kingdom of love, justice and peace. So our path of holiness does not just take place only in quiet and solitude. It is integrated into our whole life and in our activity as we go about carrying out our mission. Of course, in today's busy world with all its distractions, moments of silence and heartfelt prayer before God are greatly needed as well. A spirit of holiness can fill both our activity and our solitude, so that every moment of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness.

As we grow in holiness, we bear greater fruit for the world. All the Baptised need to be empowered to bring the Good News as a light for the world wherever we find ourselves.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

- Q. Do I see my life as a 'mission'? What does this mean for me? What message does Jesus want to bring to the world by my life?
- Q. Taking the path of holiness involves following the way of Christ in all aspects of my life. Am I ready to follow the way of Jesus? What is involved in living this out?
- Q. Do I find it easier to find the path to holiness in activity or in silence?

DO NOT BE AFRAID OF HOLINESS

Sometimes holiness can seem like something that can put restrictions on us. However, Pope Francis reminds us that being holy does not take away our vitality or joy. Rather, ***we become what God had in mind when we were created; we become faithful to our deepest selves and who we are meant to be.*** In fact, we become more alive and more human. A life in God sets us free from enslavement and is where we recognise our great dignity.

"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"' (GE, 34).

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

- Q. How are you encouraged or discouraged by Pope Francis' words to take on the path of holiness? Is there a personal cost to this way of life?
- Q. How does being holy make us more human?
- Q. What does it mean to 'become a Saint'?
- Q. Can I say 'yes' to a path of holiness?

2

On Two Subtle Enemies of Holiness



OPENING PRAYER

O God who makes all things new, open our hearts and minds as we come together to reflect on your call to practice holiness in our daily lives. Help us to hear and respond to you every day. May we learn in this time of prayer how to be more loving toward you, others and ourselves. As well, may we learn to trust in your abundant love for us and all of your creation, and inspire us to be witnesses of your love to others. Amen.

TWO COMMON TRAPS

On the path of holiness, Pope Francis says there are two common traps: contemporary forms of Pelagianism and Gnosticism which were condemned as heresies of the early Church. Pope Francis says that Pelagianism and Gnosticism are more concerned with human ideas about God rather than with Jesus and other people. Moreover, they only “give rise to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelising, one analyses and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying” (GE 35). In order to reject the subtle ways in which we might practice new forms of Pelagianism and Gnosticism, Pope Francis calls us to leave the judging and salvation of ourselves and others to God, to focus instead on God’s grace, and to focus on loving each other.

ON CONTEMPORARY GNOSTICISM - “I know the true faith and you do not”

The religious milieu of early Western civilisation involved the existence of many faiths, philosophies, and ‘holy’ teachers. Some even mimicked Christianity. In the end, the imitations were found to be completely contrary to the Good News of Jesus Christ. They were called heresies. One such heresy was Gnosticism.

A faith without flesh

There were many types of Gnosticisms in existence, but all of them had in common the belief in a purely divine Jesus. That is, a Jesus that did not suffer and die, but who imparted special knowledge (*gnosis*, Greek) to just one special group. This knowledge was the key to salvation.

Pope Francis points out that faith for Gnostics is an intellectual exercise: “They judge others based on their ability to understand the complexity of certain doctrines” and they are “incapable of touching Christ’s suffering flesh in others, locked up as they are in an encyclopedia of abstractions” (GE 37). Moreover, Gnostics “absolutise their own theories and force others to submit to their way of thinking”. Pope Francis says it is one thing to approach the Gospel with “a healthy and humble use of reason”. It is another to approach it with “a cold and harsh logic that seeks to dominate everything” (GE 39).

Q. Have you ever judged someone else’s faith based on what they know, or felt judged yourself?

A doctrine without mystery

By presenting a perfect, complete and clear explanation of God, Pope Francis says Gnostics “domesticate the mystery” of God (GE 40). Yet in truth, no one can know when and how we will each encounter God (GE 41).

Inversely, we cannot also claim to know where each of us will NOT encounter God. In the most unthinkable hopeless circumstances, God is present. We are called to find God in these circumstances, “in every human life”. Gnostics find this difficult as it involves letting go of control and perfect explanations (GE 42).



The limits of reason

A further limitation of Gnosticism is becoming deluded about one's superiority over others and believing one has already 'arrived' in this journey of holiness. As Pope Francis explains: "We can think 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'" (*GE 45*). This not only serves to close us off to relationships with others but also closes us from a relationship with God who reveals and constantly calls us to *metanoia* (Greek) - the conversion of our hearts and minds.

Essentially, Gnosticism is about "a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings" (*GE 36*). But if our faith exists only to affirm or assure us, then it is a stale faith which is inward-looking and concerned only with its own comfort. Pope Francis challenges us to resist the temptation to practice a contemporary form of Gnosticism so that our growth in holiness is not about having special secret knowledge but rather about always growing and learning in our faith.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

- Q. What does it mean to have a thinking faith?
- Q. Describe a time when you were challenged beyond your own beliefs about following Jesus.
- Q. Was there a time you felt the presence of God in the least expected of circumstances?
- Q. Name one way you can practice being open to God's grace in your daily life.

ON CONTEMPORARY PELAGIANISM -

"This is the only proper way of Christian practice"

While Gnosticism is about having the 'right knowledge', Pelagianism is concerned with 'doing the right practice'. Both heresies reject difference and dialogue, asserting that only they have sole possession of 'true' Christianity.

An often-overlooked Church teaching

Pelagianism was a heresy which existed in the early days of the Church. This heresy was especially encountered by St Augustine of Hippo when he promoted his doctrine on grace: for Augustine, there is nothing that we human beings can do to earn or lose God's grace which is unmerited and freely given. We do not save ourselves; it is only because of God's grace that we are saved.

The Pelagians had a great problem with this because they were afraid this teaching would lead to moral laxity. They reasoned that if God alone saves, why should anyone strive to be good at all? Therefore, the Pelagians taught that both will and action saved a person. That is, it is by our own efforts and good works that we are put in right relationship with God. This did not allow room for the gift of God's grace. As Pope Francis says, **"only on the basis of God's gift, freely accepted and humbly received, can we cooperate by our own efforts in our progressive transformation"** (GE, 62). Indeed, our cooperation with grace is an essential part of our path to holiness.

Q. How much do we believe that nothing we do can change God's absolute love for us and mercy towards us?

A will lacking humility

Pope Francis says of those who practice a form of Pelagianism today: "even though they speak warmly of God's grace, ultimately [they] trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style" (GE 49).

By trusting in our own efforts, we close ourselves off from the grace of God. Pope Francis advises: "Unless we can acknowledge our concrete and limited situation, we will not be able to see the real and possible steps that the Lord demands of us at every moment, once we are attracted and empowered by his gift" (GE 50).

Q. Am I being called to see God at work in a difficult or challenging part of my life?

New pelagians

The new forms of Pelagianism today appear as such: "an obsession with the law, an absorption with social and political advantages, a punctilious concern for the Church's liturgy, doctrine and prestige, a vanity about the ability to manage practical matters, and an excessive concern with programmes of self-help and personal fulfilment." Pope Francis continues by explaining: "Some Christians spend their time and energy on these things, rather than letting themselves be led by the Spirit in the way of love, rather than being passionate about communicating the beauty and the joy of the Gospel and seeking out the lost among the immense crowds that thirst for Christ" (GE 57).

These then are the keys to resist new forms of Pelagianism – to focus on love as the Spirit leads us, and to focus on



the beauty and joy of the Gospel rather than the rigid following of rules and traditional practices at the cost of neglecting the human person in front of us, who may in fact be suffering in ways that are unknown to us.

The summation of the law

Pope Francis points us to Saint Paul who says "that what truly counts is 'faith working through love'" (Gal 5:6). He then says: "We are called to make every effort to preserve charity". By loving another we in fact fulfill the law of God. "For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Gal 5:14)" (GE 60).

We are called to resist the temptation of practicing a contemporary form of Pelagianism by accepting that people are at different stages of their faith journey, and accepting that people can express their faith in different ways. The very nature of our Catholicity is that it has room for everyone in their diversity. Our role is not to judge but instead to walk with others in the love of the Lord.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

Q. Do you show trust in God's grace or is this an ongoing struggle?

Q. Describe a time when you experienced God's unmerited and surprising grace.



ST THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX (1837 -1897)
– “Love as our vocation”

Considering the mystical body of the Church, I had not recognised myself in any of the members...or rather I desired to see myself in them all. Charity gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the Church had a body composed of different members, the most necessary and most noble of all could not be lacking to it, and so I understood that the Church has a Heart and that this Heart was BURNING WITH LOVE. I understood it was Love alone that made the Church’s members act, that if Love ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood. I understood that LOVE COMPRISED ALL VOCATIONS, THAT LOVE WAS EVERYTHING, THAT IT EMBRACED ALL TIMES AND PLACES... IN A WORD, THAT IT WAS ETERNAL! Then, in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my Love...my vocation, at last I have found it...MY VOCATION IS LOVE!

Q. In what ways does love inspire your daily actions?

JOURNALING – WORKING AT HOLINESS IN MY LIFE

- What has spoken to me deeply during this time of prayer?
- How do I see Jesus and my relationship with him differently?
- What is one new insight I have gained about holiness in my life?
- What is one thing I can practice this week as a result of my reflection?

At the end of your journaling time, you may wish to share your insights with each other in the group.

FINAL PRAYER

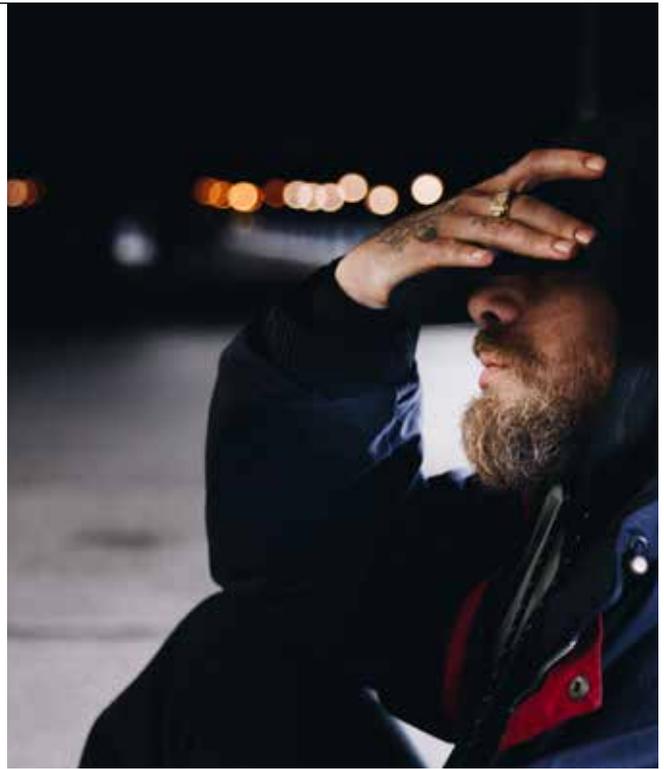
Loving God, we give thanks for your gracious gift of grace, at work in our lives each and every day. Give us the eyes to see your presence with us, and to align our whole selves with where you are gently leading us. Let your grace in us spill out into loving action for our brothers and sisters. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.



Office for Evangelisation
CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF BROKEN BAY

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In the Light of the Master



THE BEATITUDES - A CHRISTIAN'S IDENTITY CARD

In order to add flesh to the theories of what it means to be holy, Pope Francis places before us Jesus' teaching in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12). In these statements, we find what we must do, each in our own way, that leads to holiness. Not only do they tell us what Jesus taught, they actually show us a portrait of Jesus himself that we ourselves are called to reflect on in our daily lives. ***The Beatitudes are a Christian's identity card.***

Pope Francis challenges us to listen to these words in a way that unsettles us and allows us to be transformed by them:

"Let us listen once more to Jesus, with all the love and respect that the Master deserves. Let us allow his words to unsettle us, to challenge us and to demand a real change in the way we live. Otherwise, holiness will remain no more than an empty word" (GE,66).

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, as I read Jesus' words in sacred Scripture, give me an attentive heart to listen deeply to each word. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I will open myself as best I can to hear your word spoken to me this day. I will allow your word to unsettle me and to challenge me. I will be attentive to discerning your call for change in my life where it will bring me closer into relationship with you. Give me the courage to change where I need to so that your word can bear fruit in my life and not remain empty. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

HOLINESS IS: BEING POOR OF HEART

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

What is it that gives us surety in our life, at the expense of the need for God? Wealth, for example, can allow us to be self-satisfied and leave no room for God or for others. Having a poor heart is similar to an attitude of "holy indifference" to all created things. This brings an interior freedom that allows the Lord's newness to enter.

Q. Would you say that you are 'poor in spirit', realising your need for God? Is there something that you cling to that gives you surety at the expense of allowing God to fill that space?

HOLINESS IS: REACTING WITH MEEKNESS AND HUMILITY

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth"

In our path of holiness in which we seek to follow Jesus, he says to us: "Learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29). In a world of conflict, enmity, pride and vanity, Jesus proposes another way, that of gentleness and humility. Whilst some will see this attitude as weakness, it is in fact a gentle strength of those who can put their trust and hope in God alone. It is the attitude of gentleness and patience that we should bring when facing the limitations or faults of others, even our opponents.

Q. Do you find it easy or difficult to be gentle and humble? How might this be an attitude of strength, rather than weakness?



HOLINESS IS: KNOWING HOW TO MOURN WITH OTHERS

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”

Mourning and painful situations are at odds with the entertainment and pleasure that the world holds up to us as to what makes for a good life. The world would rather try to cover up and hide pain, sickness and suffering, but the Cross is never really absent. A more authentic response is to sympathise and not be afraid to share in the suffering of others. By acting with compassion we come close to the other, and can truly touch life’s depths. Here we find meaning of life and authentic happiness by coming to the aid of those who suffer.

Q. Are you able to share a time in which you have suffered with others and which allowed you to ‘touch life’s depths?’ How was Jesus present there?

HOLINESS IS: HUNGERING AND THIRSTING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”

Jesus calls us to yearn for justice, for at some point, justice will come. Many suffer injustice by looking on while others divvy up the good things in life. Again, Jesus’ way of justice is at odds with the world and its corruption and manipulations. He calls us to pursue justice for the poor, weak and most vulnerable; and to be just in our decisions every day.

Q. In what ways do you express a hunger for justice in your life?

HOLINESS IS: SEEING AND ACTING WITH MERCY

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy”

Pope Francis shows us two aspects of mercy: firstly to give, help and serve others, and secondly to forgive others, summing it up in the golden rule, “in everything, do to others as you would have them do to you”. When we forgive, we participate in some small measure in God’s own perfection. We should see ourselves as an ‘army of the forgiven’, as ones who have been looked upon with divine compassion, and should look on others with compassion in the same way.

Q. Do I have a sense of being “looked upon with divine compassion” by God? How does this make me feel?

How might this understanding allow me to be able to forgive others?

HOLINESS IS: KEEPING A HEART FREE OF ALL THAT TARNISHES LOVE

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God”

The heart is where our real intentions and what we truly desire are found. We need to guard our hearts from what is deceitful, impure and insincere. God looks to our heart, and wishes to give us a new heart, pure, undefiled, and capable of love. Whilst bad intentions can proceed from the heart and lead to bad actions, a pure heart is one that genuinely loves God and our brothers and sisters, not just in words. The extent to which this love prevails allows us to see God.

Q. How well do I guard my heart from what is harmful and which does not allow me to love?

HOLINESS IS: SOWING PEACE ALL AROUND US

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”

Jesus sent his disciples out to bring peace, and so we too are urged to work for peace and unity. Peacemakers build peace and friendship in society, and the reward is indeed great - to be called children of God. Bringing peace, though, is not always easy, and in our day-to-day, the simple act of gossiping, for example, can be quite destructive. We need to be ‘artisans of peace’, a craft that demands creativity, sensitivity, skill, and an openness of heart. It means embracing everyone, even the most difficult, and resolving conflict so as to make possible a new way forward.

Q. How do I go about being a peacemaker in my day-to-day life? Is there a situation in my life where I am called to bring peace?

HOLINESS IS: ACCEPTING DAILY THE PATH OF THE GOSPEL, EVEN THOUGH IT MAY CAUSE US PROBLEMS

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

The path of the Gospel that Jesus proposes to us is not an easy one. Worldly interests and the structures of society get in our way of living the Gospel, and our attempts can be met with suspicion and ridicule. Many people are indeed persecuted in the struggle to live a life of love and justice, from being slandered to the shedding of blood. We are reminded that the Cross remains an inevitable part of the journey, but is the source of our growth and sanctification.

Unless we wish to sink into an obscure mediocrity, let us not long for an easy life, for “whoever would save his life will lose it” (Mt 16:25). (GE, 90)

Q. What difficulties have you encountered in the living out of the Gospel? Is it worth it?

IN FIDELITY TO JESUS

If we seek the holiness that is pleasing to God, the works of mercy, as outlined in Matthew chapter 25, give us a criterion with which to judge our progress:

“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).

Holiness is not just about mystical experiences, but also about contemplating Christ and recognising him in the poor and suffering in whom he wished to be identified.

Here we see the heart of Christ which we seek to imitate. We find that mercy is the “beating heart of the Gospel.”

Holiness involves a deep recognition of the dignity of each human being. Pope Francis gives us the following example:

“If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian! Can holiness somehow be understood apart from this lively recognition of the dignity of each human being?” (GE, 98)

This leads Christians to a healthy unease at the evident need for just social and economic systems. In this regard, Pope Francis specifically mentions the welcome and hospitality offered to migrants.

Living the Gospel authentically needs to hold together both a relationship with the Lord and actions of mercy and justice - we shouldn’t separate the purely spiritual with the practical action. Whilst our prayer and worship is primary, to truly grow in holiness we are called to be tenacious in our practice of the works of mercy, especially towards the underprivileged.

Being too concerned only with ourselves and obsessed with our own pleasure means that we can find it hard to show any real concern for those in need. We may find that we need to cultivate a simpler and less consumerist life, and not be so caught up with superficial information and virtual reality which wastes precious time and can leave us indifferent to others.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

Q. How much of the expression of my faith lies in prayer and worship, versus action in the works of mercy?

Q. Do I share an unease with unjust social and economic systems? How might I work towards justice in these areas?

Q. How can I foster within myself a greater recognition of the dignity of each human person?

Q. Is there a space in my life to care for those in need and practice the works of mercy?

4

Signs of Holiness in Today's World

OPENING PRAYER

O God who makes all things new, open our hearts and minds as we come together to reflect on your call to practice holiness in our daily lives. Help us to hear and to respond to you in our daily lives. May we learn in this time of prayer how to be more loving toward you, others and ourselves. Moreover, may we learn to trust in your abundant love for us and all of your creation, and inspire us to be a witness of your love to others.

SIGNS OF HOLINESS

Using the Beatitudes and Matthew 25:31-46 as the basis for a life of holiness, Pope Francis presents five signs of holiness which he describes as “five great expressions of love for God and neighbour... in the light of certain dangers and limitations present in today’s culture.” These five signs contrast present dangers such as “anxiety... sullenness; the self-content bred by consumerism; individualism” and various forms of “ersatz spirituality”. The five signs are: (1) Perseverance, patience and meekness; (2) Joy and a sense of humour; (3) Boldness and passion; (4) In community; and (5) In constant prayer.

FIVE SIGNS OF HOLINESS

1 Perseverance, patience, and meekness (GE 112-121)

“The first of these great signs is solid grounding in the God who loves and sustains us. This source of inner strength enables us to persevere amid life’s ups and downs, but also to endure hostility, betrayal and failings on the part of others.”

Pope Francis recognises that we live in a world that is “fast-paced, noisy, and aggressive”. He says that “**through patience and constancy in doing good**”, we can communicate a contrasting message. That is, we can show God’s fidelity of love to all of us by our fidelity of love towards others; by never giving up on them especially when they experience “anxiety and distress”.



It is easy to be caught up in subtle forms of violence because of our aggressive and selfish inclinations, through seeking revenge, acting in anger, verbal violence towards others through various forms of communications, lying, or looking down on others and judging them.

As an antidote, Pope Francis tells us to turn to the words of St John of the Cross who says: “Always prefer to be taught by all, rather than to desire teaching even the least of all... Rejoice in the good of others as if it were your own, and desire that they be given precedence over you in all things; this you should do wholeheartedly.”

Ultimately, we need to realise that without humility, we will not be on a path to holiness. Humility is being grounded in who you really are, and avoiding egotism.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION:

- Q. How aware are you of ‘subtle forms of violence’ in the world around you? What expression might these take?
- Q. In what way do you try to live humbly in your life? How can you grow in this endeavour?

2 Joy and a sense of humour (GE 122-128)

“Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the Saints are joyful and full of good humour.” Pope Francis challenges Christians to be joyful rather than appearing as someone who has just returned from a funeral. As he once said: “If you have a face of a funeral wake, how can they believe that you are



redeemed, that your sins have been forgiven?”

Pope Francis points out that the Christian life in fact is “joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17), for the necessary result of the love of charity is joy...” Mary, the model of discipleship, herself begins the Magnificat with: “My Soul proclaims your greatness, O my God, and my spirit has rejoiced in you, my Saviour.” The Magnificat is not just a song of praise. Rather it also expresses a deep trust in the God of mercy and justice, who acts in history to save us all.

Even when difficulties arise, we retain our “deep security” and “serene hope” in this salvation history, for it tells us that the cross and death do not have the last say. Pope Francis says himself: “Hard times may come, when the Cross casts its shadow, **yet nothing can destroy the supernatural joy that ‘adapts and changes, but always endures,** even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.”

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION:

- Q. What are the sources of deep joy for you? Do you recognise this is God at work in your life?
- Q. In times of difficulty is there a text or a practice which helps you to remember God’s infinite love for you?

3 Boldness and passion (GE 129 -139)

If God has done great things for us, why would we not proclaim it to the mountain tops? In Matthew 5:15 we find: “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.”

We are called to be unafraid to proclaim the Good News of God and proclaim a different narrative to what the world might give us. Where in this world the celebrities, politicians and media moguls define our economies, in God’s world it is the poor, the stranger, the outsider or the marginalised, and forgotten who take priority. We must not be afraid to say that another world is possible and to never grow tired of working towards a world of peace and justice.

Pope Francis points to Jesus himself, saying: “Look at Jesus. His deep compassion reached out to others. It did not make him hesitant, timid or self-conscious, as so often happens with us. Quite the opposite. His compassion made him go out actively to preach and to send others on a mission of healing and liberation. Let us acknowledge our weakness but allow Jesus to lay hold of it and send us too on mission.”

Where should we exercise boldness and passion? Pope Francis says beyond our own comfortable spaces and at the fringes of society: “**...if we dare go to the fringes, we will find [Jesus] there;** indeed, he is already there. Jesus is already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, in their troubles and in their profound desolation. He is already there.” Let us then respond to the Spirit instead of “trying to make Christian life a museum of memories”.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION:

- Q. Describe a time when you acted with passion and boldness in proclaiming the Good News.
- Q. Where are some of the fringes of your society, and is it possible for you to reach out to the people there?

4 In community (GE 140-146)

When we do not live in community “we can grow too isolated, lose our sense of reality and inner clarity, and easily succumb.” True holiness not only leads us to live in community and communion with others but also leads us to be open to other people including those who can be very different to ourselves. For it is in community that we truly learn what it is to love someone, as 1 John 4:7-8 tells us: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” Only in an atmosphere of loving relationships can we be challenged to expand our hearts and minds and grow in the love of God.

Pope Francis tells us “Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others.” This common life with others “whether in the family, the parish, the religious community or any other, is made up of small everyday things.” Those small things make a difference to a life of holiness when they become small acts of love that build trust, hope, and unity in diversity. Particularly, Pope Francis says of the little acts of love: **“A community that cherishes the little details of love**, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father’s plan. There are times when, by a gift of the Lord’s love, we are granted, amid these little details, consoling experiences of God.”

**FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION:**

- Q. How has God shown you that you are loved and sustained by God’s love?
- Q. When have you communicated God’s love to someone who was challenging for you?
- Q. What small acts of love do you recognise in your family/community?

5 In constant prayer (GE 147- 177)

This seems obvious and yet it is one of those vital practices that can go by the wayside when our lives are already full and busy. Yet Pope Francis points us to the Saints who found “an exclusive concern with this world to be narrow and stifling, and, amid their own concerns and commitments, they long for God, losing themselves [then] in praise and contemplation of the Lord.”

Prayer is where we can discern our paths of holiness, the Spirit’s promptings. We need to make space for this. Otherwise, “any decisions we make may only be window-dressing that, rather than exalting the Gospel in our lives, will mask or submerge it. For each disciple, it is essential to spend time with the Master, to listen to his words, and to learn from him always. Unless we listen, all our words will be nothing but useless chatter.”

In addition to a time of discernment, prayer can also be contemplation of the face of Jesus, remembrance of God at work in our lives, intercession for those in need and those we love, and worship and praise of God in Word and in Sacrament, especially in the Eucharist where Pope Francis says “...we renew our covenant with God and allow God to carry out ever more fully the work of transforming our lives.”

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION:

- Q. When do you find yourself praying? How much does it affect your life?
- Q. Do you need to commit more time for prayer or action? You may wish to write down your commitment in your journal.



KARL RAHNER (1904-1984)

“God comes to us continually”

God comes to us continually...both directly and indirectly. God demands of us both work and pleasure, and wills that each should not be hindered, but rather strengthened, by the other. Thus, the interior person possesses life in both these ways, in activity and in rest. And this person is whole and undivided in each of them, for s/he is entirely in God when s/he joyfully rests and is entirely in him/herself when s/he actively loves.

Q. Do you have a sense of God continually in your life or rather in discreet instances?

JOURNALING – WORKING AT HOLINESS IN MY LIFE

- What has spoken to me deeply during this time of prayer?
- How do I see Jesus and my relationship with him differently?
- What is one new insight I have gained about holiness in my life?
- What is one thing I can practice this week as a result of my reflection?

At the end of your journaling time, you may wish to share your insights with each other in the group.

FINAL PRAYER

Grant me, O Lord, good digestion, and also something to digest. Grant me a healthy body, and the necessary good humour to maintain it. Grant me a simple soul that knows to treasure all that is good and that doesn't frighten easily at the sight of evil, but rather finds the means to put things back in their place. Give me a soul that knows not boredom, grumbling, sighs and laments, nor excess of stress, because of that obstructing thing called 'I'. Grant me, O Lord, a sense of good humour. Allow me the grace to be able to take a joke and to discover in life a bit of joy, and to be able to share it with others".

St Thomas More

5

Spiritual Combat, Vigilance and Discernment

In this final section of *Gaudete et Exsultate*, we are reminded that the Christian life is not easy, being a battle not only with the world, but also with evil. Much discernment is required.

OPENING PRAYER

Jesus, give me the courage to live out the Christian path of holiness that you are calling me to. I acknowledge that it will not be easy. I pray for strength and perseverance in my journey. I trust that you are with me: send your Spirit to guide me in the way that leads to fullness of life. Give me a discerning heart so that I can follow your will for me in my life. Amen.

CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A BATTLE

There are many battles in attempting to live out an authentic Christian life. We can be deceived when we give in to the world's values and a worldly mentality; and our own human weaknesses pose obstacles as well. However, there is also a real and constant struggle with evil which is present in our midst.

Pope Francis speaks of the reality of the devil, not as just an idea or figure of speech, but rather as a personal being who assails us. If we water this down and let down our guard, then we can be more vulnerable to despair, hatred and other negative practices that can be destructive in our lives.

Thankfully, in this constant struggle, we are given the spiritual tools to persevere and overcome: "faith-filled prayer, meditation on the word of God, the celebration of Mass, Eucharistic adoration, sacramental Reconciliation, works of charity, community life, missionary outreach" (*GE*, 162).

Jesus rejoices every time we make progress with little victories where we overcome any opposition. These are



the steps towards holiness. We can't be 'neutral' in this endeavour, but should strive to foster goodness and continually grow in love. **Vigilance is required, so that we don't become complacent and self-satisfied.** We need to be attentive even to subtle ways that we can be deceived by evil or forms of self-centredness, so that our spiritual life does not get weakened or corrupted.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

- Q. How would you describe a 'worldly' mentality compared to God's way?
- Q. How do you understand the role of evil in people's lives or in the world?
- Q. What helps you to stay strong in your spiritual life?
- Q. Can you describe a time when you overcame a negativity in your life? How did you do it?

DISCERNMENT

In order to work out which path to take, we need to be able to discern what comes from the Holy Spirit and what does not. Discernment is more than just common sense, but rather a gift from the Spirit that we should ask for and cultivate through prayer, reflection and guidance.

Discernment is really needed today given the many options presented to us which all seem valid and good. With the prevalence of an online culture, it is easy to become caught up in every passing trend and not be able



to determine what is best for us. With each new element in our life, discernment can help us to hold on to, and move forward, with what is good. We need to examine our desires and anxieties within us, as well as the signs of the times around us, so that we can recognise the paths that will lead us to full freedom in Christ. “Test everything; hold fast to what is good” (1 Thess 5:21).

This discernment is not only needed in extraordinary situations, but all the time. It is the tool that will help us to “recognise God’s timetable” and **be able to hear the promptings of the Spirit** which is always inviting us to grow. Pope Francis points out that “Often discernment is exercised in small and apparently irrelevant things, since greatness of spirit is manifested in simple everyday realities” (*GE*, 169). We should strive for all that is great, but at the same time also focus on each day’s responsibilities and commitments. A daily “examination of conscience” is a worthwhile exercise in this regard, to help us see the workings of the Spirit across our day, and where we moved away from the path of holiness.

We must remember that discernment is a grace, a gift that allows us to tap into the “unique and mysterious” plan that God has for the real purpose of our lives. We have to be open to hearing this. God can reveal this to us in many ways, but it is essential that we make time for silence in prolonged prayer so that we can better hear

and interpret the inspirations we receive from God. We must have a readiness to listen - to the Lord, to others, and to reality itself. Listening allows us to put aside our usual way of seeing things so that we can be **open to the ‘more’ that God is offering us**. This ‘more’ can be challenging, but is always for our benefit. Let’s be open to these disruptive calls.

“In this way, we become truly open to accepting a call that can shatter our security, but lead us to a better life. It is not enough that everything be calm and peaceful. God may be offering us something more, but in our comfortable inadvertence, we do not recognise it” (*GE*, 172).

It is important to remember that we are not discerning what we can get out of life for ourselves, but rather we are discerning how to better live the mission we received at our Baptism - to continue the mission of Jesus of bringing about the Kingdom of God in the world. This involves some sacrifice on our part, and we are reminded that the logic of God that we are following is that of the Cross. This is the dynamic that leads Pope Francis to remind us once again, as he did at the start of *Gaudete et Exsultate*, that God asks everything of us, yet God also gives everything to us. Let’s not be afraid to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit to allow God to enter so that our lives can be brought to fulfilment as we carry out the mission that is ours in the world.

FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

- Q. Do you take time to discern what God might be calling you to? Do you make time for prolonged, silent prayer? In what ways could you incorporate this style of prayer in your life?
- Q. Have you experienced a disruptive call of God?

- Q. Is there anything holding you back from giving more to God?
- Q. Are you open to a newness that might disrupt you? Could you say 'yes' to this?
- Q. What do you think is the 'everything' that God wants to give to us?

THE EXAMEN

The Examen is a Jesuit practice originating from St Ignatius of Loyola that looks prayerfully at our thoughts, words and actions of each day. Through this spiritual exercise, we become attentive to our lived experience, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we become aware of God's presence in each part of our day. It allows us to discern where we acted with love and where we failed to, and resolve to better co-operate with God's will tomorrow. Pope Francis encourages us to adopt this practice as a way to grow in holiness each day. Try it now. If you are doing this exercise during the day, look over yesterday. If you are doing this exercise in the evening, look over today. Take your time - allow 15 minutes.

1 Ask God to be with you

Take a moment to quieten down and let yourself enter into God's presence.

**2 Give thanks**

Give thanks for the gift of today and the many ways you have been blessed. Call to mind two or three things from today that you are grateful for. Thank God for them.

3 Review the day

Guided by the Holy Spirit, look back prayerfully at your whole day, at your thoughts, words and actions at each moment. Notice how you acted in each situation, your feelings and motives. Where were you loving? Where did you turn away from loving? Think about specific people, places and events.

Where was God in each of these moments?

- Start with getting up in the morning – what was it like? Where was God?
- Move to the rest of your morning
- Think about the middle of your day
- What was your afternoon like? Where was God there?
- Now move to the evening – what happened?
- Remember the end of your day - where was God present to you?

4 Ask forgiveness

In the reflection on your day, you may have come across some shortcomings and things that you regret. Remember these, and express sorrow to God, asking God's forgiveness and the grace to do better.

5 Look to tomorrow

Was there anything especially meaningful that has come up in your reflection? Speak to God about this.

Look toward the day to come, asking for God's grace for tomorrow, especially in the areas that you feel called to improve. Resolve to cooperate and trust in God's guidance.

