

Pope releases new Apostolic Exhortation: Gaudete et Exsultate – Rejoice and be glad

[How to be happy, how to be holy]

Ten Key Points

Pope Francis has just released his new Apostolic Exhortation: Gaudete et Exsultate - on the call to holiness - where he challenges the whole Church to promote anew the desire for holiness - in a practical way, for our own time. After analysing and forcefully dismissing two subtle enemies to holiness - contemporary gnosticism and pelagianism - as 'aberrations and obstacles' to holiness, Pope Francis appeals in detail to the Beatitudes of Matthew and Luke. Here lies the path to our happiness, or indeed our holiness, by living out the demands and joys of the Gospel. More deeply yet, the Holy Father identifies those harmful ideologies which today strike at the heart of the Gospel, where faith is divorced from deeds, where mercy is lost.

Our striving for holiness must be grounded in prayer and discernment so that our lives are transformed in the light of mercy and grace. This entails action and building the Kingdom through social action and care for the marginalised. Pope Francis offers five great expressions of love of God and of neighbour as signs of true holiness for today's culture.

Finally, he sets out the landscape in which today's spiritual combat is fought against the great enemy, the devil. This calls for vigilance and discernment. Thus, the joyful holiness of the Gospel is made manifest to the world in the everyday lives of ordinary people.

Ten Key Points:

1. The Pope is encouraging and challenging us on the path to holiness because holiness is necessary for our happiness - in order to bring out the best of who we are and to embrace the unique plan of God for us and for the world.
2. He is clear that our personal call to holiness entails action and is achieved in the context of the saints in heaven, our communities around us and the wider, suffering of our brothers and sisters. A person seeking holiness cannot ignore injustice and should seek social change, recognising that holiness cannot be understood apart from the recognition of the dignity of each human being. Our whole life must be seen as a mission and a way of building God's Kingdom - the ultimate criterion on which our life will be judged is what we have done for others.
3. The Pope offers practical support and advice for our journey - how to get there as well as warning of dangers facing us on our journey. Dangers in false forms of holiness, violence in our thoughts and daily lives, digital communications, consumerism as well as the very real and present danger of satan himself. The Pope asks us to discern any traces of these blocks to holiness in our lives and warns us not to let our guard down - our path to holiness is a spiritual battle.

4. He encourages us each of us in our own way to live out the Beatitudes in our lives - giving very practical ways of how to take on these challenges.
5. Pope Francis offers five great expressions of love of God and of neighbour that he considers of particular importance in the light of certain dangers and limitations present in today's culture: Perseverance, Patience, Meekness, Joy and a Sense of Humour, Boldness and Passion. These signs of true holiness make it possible for us to give a witness of holiness in our fast-paced, noisy and aggressive world.
6. In order to be able to reach out to others he urges us to live lives of simplicity resisting the demands of a consumerist society that leaves us unsatisfied and anxious.
7. Holiness is found in everyday people and everyday things but he repeats throughout the document that our striving for holiness must be grounded in prayer and discernment so that our lives are transformed in the light of mercy and Grace. He is clear that holiness can only be achieved in the power of the Holy Spirit and through union with Jesus - sometimes born in heartache and sorrow but always listening to the Lord. The Pope strongly urges us to spend time with Jesus in silence, contemplating Him in order to restore our humanity and enable us to reach out to others.
8. He maintains that this attitude of listening entails obedience to the Gospel and to the Magisterium and is not a matter of applying rules but in discerning the Spirit for our time with the dynamic capacity to pose questions, doubts and inquiries. Contrary to the promptings of the Spirit, the life of the Church can become a museum piece or the possession of a select few.
9. He ends the exhortation on a note of joy and rejoicing, encouraging us to go to where humanity is most wounded and where people are seeking an answer to the question of life's meaning.
10. The Pope writes this exhortation as one who walks and prays beside us so that our desire for God finds expression in our daily lives and enables us to share a happiness that the world cannot take from us.

'Holiness is a gift that is offered to everyone, no one is excluded; it constitutes the distinctive character of every Christian'