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## Pope Francis, Joy of Holiness

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POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE*  
*ON THE CALL TO HOLINESS IN TODAY'S WORLD.*

VATICAN CITY. 19 MARCH, 2018.

Pope Francis encourages all Christians, by virtue of their baptism, to answer the God-given call to holiness. This exhortation consists of five chapters. The first (nos. 3–34) outlines its purpose: to speak of holiness in a practical way. Personal weakness is not to discourage us – even the saints had faults – but rather, we rely on the Spirit of the risen Lord who empowers each one to fulfil their unique mission for the realization of God's kingdom in the world.

The second chapter (nos. 35–62) confronts two false ideas of holiness: Gnosticism and Pelagianism. The first is a heresy that idolizes the intellect and promotes the illusion that all of faith's mysteries are ultimately intelligible. It turns “the Christian experience into a set of intellectual exercises” (46). The second exaggerates the role of personal effort and undermines the primacy of grace. Growth in holiness is a progressive transformation with God's free gift growing and developing within us (56).

The third chapter (nos. 63–109) presents the Beatitudes, as recounted in Matthew's gospel (5:3–12), and reflects on each of them in turn. As each human being is “infinitely loved by the Father” (98) so we are to express that love by being merciful to each other. The Lord judges us by this one clear criterion (Matthew 25:31–46). True holiness is a personal relationship with Christ that recognizes him in the poor and the suffering and works for a just society.

The fourth chapter (nos. 110–157) proposes five signs of Christian holiness. First, a strong confidence in the abiding love of God that enables perseverance through life's humiliations and humble patience in constantly doing what is right. Second, joy and good humor that witnesses to an “inner hope and a spiritual fulfilment that the world cannot understand or appreciate” (125). Third, a fervor and apostolic courage that comes from within to share the Gospel with others. Fourth, a common life with regular sharing of word and Eucharist and a cherishing of “the little details of love” (145) that guards against an isolating individualism. Fifth, a commitment to personal prayer as times “spent alone with God are also necessary” (149).

The fifth chapter (nos. 158–177) acknowledges that the Christian life is a constant battle not only against a worldly mentality and against human weakness, but also, as Scripture attests, against the malign power of the evil one. We pray for deliverance from the power of this “personal being who assails us” (160). This is a spiritual combat best engaged by actively choosing the good and giving oneself generously to the Lord. We combat the tendency towards self-deception by praying for the spiritual gift of discernment to distinguish what is evil from what is good and to choose the good. It is through such discernment, attentive to the Gospel and the Magisterium, that “we can better accomplish the mission entrusted to us at our baptism” (174).

*William Cleary, C.S.Sp.*