



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Gaudete et Exsultate – “Rejoice and Be Glad” A Year Later



In March 2018, Pope Francis issued his **apostolic exhortation “*Gaudete et Exsultate*”** (“Rejoice and Be Glad”) that reaffirmed the Universal Call to Holiness and encouraged all Catholics to find the ways of holiness in their daily lives.

As Catholics, we are all called to be saints, to respond to the Universal Call to holiness reiterated so firmly by the Second Vatican Council. As Knights and Dames of the Order, however, the pope’s writing is particularly meaningful.

As **our Grand Master, Cardinal Edwin O’Brien**, wrote in *The Jerusalem Cross*, “Every member is well aware that the first purpose of our Order is ‘**to strengthen in its members the practice of Christian life**’ – that is, to grow in personal holiness.”

This is, of course, something that has been taught by the Church forever. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “all Christians, in any state or walk of life, are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity. All are called to holiness.”

Any papal document on holiness might restate this important Church teaching, but Francis considers it throughout the exhortation as something of a given. In doing so, he is not denigrating what the Church teaches on holiness. Rather, he wants to talk about what we can learn from these teachings and how to apply them.

For example, he notes that the processes of beatification and canonization recognize the signs of heroic virtue, the sacrifice of life in martyrdom, and certain cases where a life is constantly offered for others even unto death, in imitation of Christ.

And he is especially taken up with the notion of the quiet saints, **the “invisible saints,”** as he has writes — those who simply lead their lives in the pursuit of holiness, who may not even be conscious of their own holiness, in the sense that they live in such humility.

We are called to emulate Christ, and one of the ways we can do that is to follow the models offered by the saints. He notes particularly the four women Doctors of the Church — St. Hildegard of Bingen, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Ávila, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux. But he also brings forward an interesting woman who may surprise some: **St. Bridget of Sweden**, from the 14th century. She was a wife and a mother who was very active in her community, the world, and in the life of the Church. He is including her in this group of great Doctors of the Church because there is something about St. Bridget that strikes him as significant. She was a mystic, a saint, someone who did not hide from the world. This is not, as has been interpreted by some critics, an attack on those who seek the contemplative life. Instead, the pope is saying that there is a temptation to flee from the world, and he gives us the example of St. Bridget of Sweden for guidance.

He also presents a saint we all know — **St. Teresa of Calcutta**. If we are looking for someone who embodies everything Pope Francis is talking about in this exhortation, Mother Teresa is it: rejoice, be glad, but take that holiness into the world and live it. Mother Teresa is the saint next door. Her holiness is practical — she does not hide that sanctity from the world, but rather, to a truly heroic degree, she brought Christ to others, because she saw Christ in them.

Pope Francis also talks about the importance of **encountering Christ in our prayer**. He says that holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists of uniting ourselves to the Lord's death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him.

It can also entail reproducing, in our own lives, aspects of Jesus' earthly life, his life in communities, closeness to outcasts, poverty, and self-sacrificing love. By contemplating Christ, by emulating him, we begin to appreciate a deeper plan for our lives. **Holiness is charity lived to the full.** In a way, this entire exhortation is built around charity in action, love that cannot be hidden, love that cannot be suppressed – love that must express itself.

In that expression, Pope Francis urges us toward the perfection of the virtues.

He starts by noting some of the debilitating negatives that can develop — pessimism, sullenness, self-content, consumerism, individualism — all what he calls “forms of ersatz spirituality” that have nothing to do with God, but that dominate the current religious marketplace.

But he also looks at the great signs of solid grounding from the God who loves and sustains us — perseverance, patience, and meekness. **He includes joy and a sense of humor as qualities we need.** He is not talking about the joy held out by today's individualistic and consumerist culture. Consumerism can only offer occasional and passing pleasures, but not joy. He is speaking of a joy lived in communion, which shares and is shared. There is more happiness in giving than in receiving, and he quotes Second Corinthians: **fraternal love increases our capacity for joy.** It makes us capable of rejoicing at the joy of others and in constantly seeking out that encounter with God, of being in constant, trust-filled prayer. He is saying that, inside of us, we can discern, through the light of the Spirit, the paths of holiness to which the Lord is calling us.

It is in that silence that we need to be able to listen, to hear God properly.

Toward the end of the exhortation, Pope Francis says, **“This attitude of listening entails obedience to the Gospel** as the ultimate standard, but also to the magisterium that guards it, as we seek to

find, in the treasury of the Church, whatever is most fruitful for the today of salvation.” He is trying to accentuate the importance of listening and of obedience, but also having the touchstone of the magisterium that guards our understanding of the faith. We seek to find, as he writes, that treasury of the Church, but it is for our lives today. That humility to the teachings of the Church allows us to have humility in our spiritual lives, which enables us to turn to Christ and emulate his great humility.

Finally, for any member of the Order, there is one other significant feature to the exhortation that is most consequential. More than any other modern pontiff, Francis speaks directly about the work of the Devil, Satan, the Great Accuser – to borrow the name used in the Book of Job. The reality of evil, especially the reality of the Devil, is something that we see growing around us every day, and Francis focuses on that in his exhortation.

Blessed Bartolo Longo, the only member of the Order to be beatified, is a powerful role model in understanding this reality. In his lifetime, he overcame the glamor of evil and the allure of spiritualism and secularism to become an apostle of the Rosary. Through a profound personal conversion, he defeated evil in his own life and gives us a way to overcome it in our own journey. Pope Francis writes in the exhortation, “Along this journey, the cultivation of all that is good, progress in the spiritual life and growth in love are the best counterbalance to evil. “

As members of the Order, Francis teaches us practical ways to be holier in our own lives and how to put that into practice in our own everyday actions as we strive to be saints and to support the Christians in the Holy Land. A year after the publication of his exhortation, the pontiff’s advice is worth re-reading.

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