

## Advent Reflection

### “Our Call to Holiness with Guidance from Pope Francis”

December 13, 2018

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#### I. Background

- A. The quotes are from the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis: *Gaudete et Exultate* (On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World)  
Published March 19, 2018 – 103 pages
- B. Responses
  - 1. New York Times – Pope defends consistent ethic of life (n 101).
  - 2. Catholic Traditionalists see attacks on them (n 115).

#### II. Main Thrust

- A. Call to Holiness
- B. Some advice from Francis:
  - 1. We are all called to holiness: “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 called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do wherever we find ourselves” (n 14). “Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self. To depend on God sets us free from every form of enslavement and leads us to recognize our great dignity” (n 32). “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” (n 1).
  - 2. We must find and follow our own unique path to holiness: “The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts (cf. 1 Cor 12:7), rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them. We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness” (n 11).
  - 3. The path to holiness passes through ordinary daily activities: “This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures. Here is an example: a woman goes shopping, she meets a neighbor and they begin to speak, and the gossip starts. But she says in her heart: “No, I will not speak badly of anyone.” This is a step forward in holiness. Later, at home one of her children wants to talk to her about his hopes and dreams, and even though she is tired, she sits down and listens with patience and love. That is another sacrifice that brings holiness. Later she experiences some anxiety, but recalling the love of the Virgin Mary, she takes her rosary and prays with faith. Yet another path of holiness. Later still, she goes out onto the street, encounters a poor person, and stops to say a kind word to him. One more step” (n 16).
  - 4. Christ is our supreme model of holiness: “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’s 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” (n 20). “In the Church, holy yet made up of sinners, you will find everything you need to grow toward 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” (n 15).

5. We can learn from the saints those canonized and those next door: “I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God’s people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant” (n 7).
6. We need a synergistic interaction between reflective prayer and active efforts to humanize our world and extend the reign of God: “We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission” (n 26).
7. We should avoid esoteric claims to superior knowledge (neo-Gnosticism) and an excessive concern for programs of self-help and personal fulfillment (n 57) (neo-Pelagianism) and concentrate on the essentials of loving God and neighbor: “In other words, amid the thicket of precepts and prescriptions, Jesus clears a way to seeing two faces, that of the Father and that of our brother. He does not give us two more formulas or two more commands. He gives us two faces, or better yet, one alone: the face of God reflected in so many other faces. For in every one of our brothers and sisters, especially the least, the most vulnerable, the defenseless, and those in need, God’s very image is found. Indeed, with the scraps of this frail humanity, the Lord will shape his final work of art” (n 61).
8. The beatitudes provide guidelines for the path to holiness (blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted): The “great criterion” is Matthew 25: 31-46 (I was hungry, etc.) expands the beatitude to be merciful: “The powerful witness of the saints is revealed in their lives, shaped by the Beatitudes and the criterion of the final judgment. Jesus’ words are few and straightforward, yet practical and valid for everyone, for Christianity is meant above all to be put into practice. It can also be an object of study and reflection, but only to help us better live the Gospel in our daily lives. I recommend rereading these great biblical texts frequently, referring back to them, praying with them, trying to embody them. They will benefit us; they will make us genuinely happy” (n 109).
9. We need inner peace based on faith in a merciful God to counter the violence in our world, especially verbal violence so prevalent in our political world: “Inner strength as the work of grace, prevents us from becoming carried away by the violence that is so much a part of life today, because grace defuses vanity and makes possible meekness of heart. The saints do not waste energy complaining about the failings of others; they can hold their tongues before the faults of their brothers and sisters and avoid the verbal violence that demeans and mistreats others. Saints hesitate to treat others harshly; they consider others better than themselves (cf. Phil 2:3)” (n 116).
10. We are called to develop the gift of discernment through prayer, reflective reading and self-examination so we can make good decisions about following the best path to holiness: “Discernment is not a solipsistic self-analysis or a form of egotistical introspection, but an authentic process of leaving ourselves behind in order to approach the mystery of God, who helps us to carry out the mission to which he has called us, for the good of our brothers and sisters” (n 175).

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