

REJOICE
— *and* —
BE GLAD

GROUP READING GUIDE

to POPE FRANCIS' *Gaudete et Exsultate*

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

Gather. This Reading Guide is designed to be used either alone or with others. If you are sharing in a group, begin by welcoming everyone. Offer a special welcome to participants from other faith traditions who may join you. Ask participants to introduce themselves if needed. As your private or group session gets underway, always begin with the Sign of the Cross.

Divide this document into enough material to fill the time allotted for each of your study or prayer times, or for the amount of time your small group meets. Simply mark your stopping point for each session and take up next time where you left off. Work through the material as quickly or as slowly as you wish.

Read. If you are meeting in a small group, move around the circle and read aloud the stanzas of this summary. Rotate readers with each numbered article. Group members should note items in the pope's teaching that strike them as especially important. (Do not read aloud the article numbers. They are included to help you find each article in the original document if you want to explore in more depth certain elements of this exhortation.)

If you are using this material for private study, read the material slowly and reflectively.

Discuss and Pray. When you come to the group process notes, pause to continue around the circle, discussing or praying as the notes direct. If you're in private study, put down the booklet and pause at these points to allow the Lord to speak in your meditation; enter into prayerful conversation with him. Group users may do the same between group meetings. Use our discussion and meditation suggestions as a starting point and add your questions, prayers, or action plans.

Finish. As you come to the end of your process in each session, invite participants to identify the one or two large ideas that they hear the Holy Father teaching in that segment of the document. Each participant may hear the text differently; there are no "correct" answers.

Conclude your session with a brief prayer and hospitality.

GAUDETE
et EXSULTATE:
Rejoice and Be Glad

1 Jesus calls us to holiness and asks us for the world! In return, he offers us happiness and clarity about the purpose for which God created us. Jesus calls us to be saints and, from the earliest texts of Scripture, asks us to walk with him, trust in him, and live a holy life.

2 My goal in this reflection is to help everyone hear the call to holiness in his or her particular situation in life. I propose a practical pathway that takes into account “the risks, challenges, and opportunities” that lie before us.

CHAPTER ONE

The Call to Holiness

THE SAINTS WHO ENCOURAGE AND ACCOMPANY US

3 We learn in the Letter to the Hebrews to gather up courage, stamina, and hope, and to “run the race that is set before us.” The text assures us that we are not alone but are part of a great crowd of others who help us advance toward the goal of holiness, and these may include our mothers or grandmothers, friends or neighbors, even when their lives were not perfect.

4 For this reason, we can each say that we are guided by “the friends of God.” Being in the family of God makes it possible for us to achieve what we could never do alone. The saints who walk with us also protect and guide us; they sustain and carry us when times are difficult.

5 Whenever we canonize a saint, we recognize someone who lived his or her life for others, even up to death. An example for us in this regard is Blessed Maria Gabriella Sagheddu who dedicated her life as a Trappist nun to praying for Christian unity.

THE SAINTS “NEXT DOOR”

6 We aren’t thinking here only of those who are already canonized, but also of many others among the People of God. We do not go to the heart of the Lord alone;

we go there only as part of a rich community, blessed by God, called by God, and strengthened by God. God, in other words, draws us to himself as a people in our particular moment in history and place in life.

7 Who are you? Did you ever think God might call you to holiness? Parents who raise your kids with love, you are called. Men and women who work every day to support your families, you are called. Sick and older adults, you are called. Senior members of religious communities, you are called. I like to call this “the middle class of holiness,” saints among us who strive to hear God and follow God’s way.

8 Yes, the humblest members of our community are often the ones whom God chooses to be a model for us all. As Vatican II taught in chapter twelve of the great *Constitution on the Church*, all the baptized share in the prophetic work of witnessing to God’s love. They touch our lives in ways we don’t always see or understand. Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross reminds us that we may not know until we are in the light of heaven about all those whose loving touch formed and shaped us.

9 All Christians experience this call to holiness, and people also experience it beyond the Christian faith as God works in his mysterious ways. Holiness is “the most attractive face of the Church” because when men and women sacrifice themselves on behalf of others, it is compelling.

FOR GROUP PROCESS OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Holiness, the Holy Father teaches, is lived in everyday life when we open our hearts to grace and practice self-giving love in our normal, daily routine. What are some examples from your own life when you have seen this in others or yourself?

Who are “the saints next door” in your experience?

THE LORD CALLS

10 I want to focus here primarily on the call to holiness that the Lord has sounded in each of our hearts. Again, as the *Constitution on the Church* teaches in article eleven, the Lord calls all the faithful, regardless their state in life, to holiness. This call isn't reserved only for the ordained or religious. God calls each of us by name.

11 We should not become discouraged or begin to think that we are not worthy or capable of holiness. If we know about someone who has given himself or herself completely, such as St. Teresa of Calcutta, we should not think that we can never do what she did. We are not meant to copy St. Teresa or anyone else; God has called her to that mission, but that doesn't mean God has called us to the same work. God calls each of us to our own mission, and we must follow "the specific path the Lord has in mind for us." There are many ways to be holy witnesses to God's love, as St. John of the Cross has reminded us.

12 There have been, for example, many holy women such as Saints Hildegard, Bridget, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Ávila, or Thérèse of Lisieux. But there have also been many forgotten women whose courage and faith helped transform the family or society in which they lived.

13 I hope this will excite us! I hope it will encourage us to discern how the Lord is calling each of us. As God taught us in Jeremiah (1:5), "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you."

FOR YOU, TOO

14 Again, to be holy doesn't mean we must be ordained or join a religious order. We're tempted to believe that holiness means withdrawing from everyday life. In fact, being holy means living our lives with love and giving witness to that in everything we do. If you're called to be a religious sister, then do that with joy and commitment. If you're called to be married, love and care for your spouse. If you're called to work for a living, do so with integrity. If you're called to be a grandparent, teach the little ones to love Jesus. If you're called to be in authority, work for the common good.

15 Be open to God in whatever situation you find yourself in life. Remember, you have the power of the Spirit within you who gives you all the strength and courage you need for this. Also, you have the Church and, in the Church, you have the guiding hand of God through Scripture, liturgy, holy places, and a whole crowd of saints.

16 The kind of holiness I'm describing here is lived in small ways most of the time. For example, a woman goes shopping and meets a neighbor; she avoids gossip. Later, her children need her time; she gives it even if she is tired. She feels anxiety, so she prays. Later, she meets a homeless person, but she stops to say a kind word to him or her. Each moment is a step toward holiness.

17 We live this holiness in the particular situation in which we find ourselves each day.

18 We can live with this kind of everyday holiness because God gives us the grace to do it. Grace empowers us, it fills us with God's own life, and it is always enough for whatever we are called to do. No matter what weakness or life situation we are in, grace is powerful enough to help us live with love.

FOR GROUP PROCESS OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

As the Holy Father teaches in article 11, we are each called to holiness in the concrete and specific circumstances of our life. We live that holiness in many small ways every day. Think back over the past week as you reread article 16. What are the many small occasions for a holy response to people or situations that you have experienced in your life?

YOUR MISSION IN CHRIST

19 God gives each of us a mission in life, and we live that out in our specific moment of time.

20 The fullest meaning of our lifelong mission is to reflect the self-giving love of Jesus, to die to ourselves in every aspect of our life. In doing this, we echo the earthly life of Christ himself: our private times and our communal times, our encounters with outcasts and the poor, and all the ways in which he showed his self-giving love. As we meditate on Christ's life, we gradually incorporate his ministry into our own lives.

21 God is love, and holiness is living in that divine love and charity based on the example of Jesus. Each of our lives is a message to the world, and the message is the same: God loves you; he walks with you; he has given himself entirely for you, and now he calls you to do the same.

22 The Lord speaks through your life, but let's not get caught up in the small things you may do. You will make mistakes and experience failure; not everything a saint says or does is holy. But don't give up because it is the totality of your life that matters.

23 I invite you to listen closely to God in prayer and recognize how your call to holiness is embedded in the people, activities, and situations of your daily life. I invite you to "allow the Spirit to forge in you" how you will show the face of God to the world.

24 May you come to know the message that God wants to speak to the world through your life. May you let yourself be renewed and filled with the Holy Spirit. You're on a mission, as I said above, one that is unique to you. Even if you make mistakes and fail, God stays with you and holds you up; God gives you strength and remains with you. You have all the grace needed for your mission.

FOR GROUP PROCESS OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

*What messages is God speaking to the world
through your life? How is that message communicated
through your activities and words?*

*Pause to enter into conversation with the Lord,
listen to his voice as he calls and loves you.
If appropriate, share your prayer experience with others.*

ACTIVITY THAT SANCTIFIES

25 Remember that the call to holiness we're exploring here is also and at the same time a call to build the Reign of God. The two are inseparable. You will experience great happiness in your life when you learn the art of self-giving love and give yourself to this mission, body and soul.

26 In a sense, we're each called to become a "contemplative" in the midst of a busy life of service and love. Being a contemplative doesn't mean withdrawing to a quiet place and never coming back. It means, rather, loving silence while interacting with others; finding peace and quiet while working hard for justice; seeking prayer while serving your family, community, or the Church.

27 Engagement with the world is not "second best" to prayer and contemplation. They go hand-in-hand. The pathway to interior peace and holiness is the same as the pathway to building up the Reign of God. It isn't so much that we have accepted an arbitrary call to mission as that our very lives, oriented to God and flowing from the Spirit, *are* a mission.

28 If our very being in the world is the mission on which God has sent us, then we must embrace that with humility and peace of heart. The "spirituality of your life" connects you to your family, work, and society.

29 This does not mean we should avoid quiet and contemplation. Quite the contrary! Noisy gadgets and distractions fill today's world. If we are going to hear God's voice in this din, then we must step back and be in dialogue with the Lord. In the midst of all our daily work, we can find time for this. So, when a quiet moment presents itself, when we awaken in the night, as we prepare to pray the Mass—these are times when this dialogue may occur. And when we are in crisis, all the more do we find it necessary to speak with the Lord.

30 We must guard against the temptation to be buried in modern technology or busyness because this can draw us away from our mission and from being our truest self.

31 I invite you to develop a spirit of holiness, one that will be evident in both your solitude and your service. In this way, every moment of your life can be an expression of self-giving love and a step along the pathway to holiness.

FOR GROUP PROCESS OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

How do you balance prayer with activity?

How much time do you spend with technology each day?

How much time in prayer and contemplation?

How much time doing your daily work?

CHAPTER TWO

Two Subtle Enemies of Holiness

35 I would like to discuss now two false forms of holiness. They're both heresies from the early years of the Church, but they've never gone away completely. We call one by the name Gnosticism or intellectualism, whereby people are judged worthy (or not worthy) based on their intellectual grasp of certain doctrines, whether or not their hearts are in Christ. We call the other by the name Pelagianism or individualism, whereby people believe that by the power of their individual will rather than by the grace of Christ they can attain goodness and salvation.

Rather than opening the door to grace in a person's life, these errors tend to close that door. On the one hand, Gnostics believe that only a grasp of doctrine determines whether or not we are faithful. On the other, Pelagians believe we are saved by our own efforts and initiative. Neither leaves much room for Christ, grace, mystery, or our neighbor.

CONTEMPORARY GNOSTICISM

36 Gnosticism is concerned with a set of theories or ideas, with *knowing about* God but not necessarily *walking with* God and experiencing God's love.