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## The Call to Holiness

### REPROPOSING HOLINESS FOR EACH OF US

Holiness may seem like something that only very few people strive for or obtain, perhaps the Saints, Popes, Clergy or Religious, and some exceptional individuals who express an exemplary goodness. But Pope Francis tells us that holiness is something that every person should work towards, and that with the grace of God, all can grow in.

*Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad) is the Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Francis on the Call to Holiness in Today's World. Issued in March 2018, it repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our time, and for every person.

Reflect on the opening words of *Gaudete et Exsultate* below. Read slowly, and underline a word or phrase that stands out for you. What might Pope Francis mean by this word or phrase you have selected? What does it mean to you? What do you understand by holiness? After a quiet time of reflection, share with the group.

“REJOICE AND BE GLAD” (Mt 5:12), Jesus tells those persecuted or humiliated for his sake. 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. ...

My modest goal is to repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities. For the Lord has chosen each one of us “to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1:4).



### OPENING PRAYER

*Gracious God, as we begin this reflection on holiness, give us new insights into ways of living our lives that lead to a fullness of life. Jesus, you showed us with your words and actions what a holy life looks like. Give each of us the courage to follow your way. Holy Spirit, flow through us and bring renewal and newness to our faith lives so that we can grow in holiness and be the people we were created to be. Amen.*

### SAINTS “NEXT DOOR”

We are familiar with the many Saints who have gone before us and have been witnesses to holiness in the course of their lives. We must remember, though, that through the Holy Spirit, there is an abundance of holiness among all God's faithful people. This can be seen, for example, in the daily patience and perseverance of parents raising their children with love; people who work hard to support their families; the sick who struggle daily; and elderly Religious who remain joyful. Holiness is found in those ‘next door’ who witness to God and who reflect God's presence. These have been called the “middle class of holiness” (GE,7).

**Q. Can you name one person in your life in whom you can see threads of holiness through their perseverance in the struggles of daily life?**

### THE PERSONAL CALL TO HOLINESS ADDRESSED TO YOU

With this Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis seeks to focus specifically on the personal call to holiness that the Lord addresses to each one of us. As stated in the Vatican II documents, **“all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord – each in his or her own way – to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect.”**

(*Lumen Gentium*, 11)

The important thing to note is that each person attains holiness in his or her own way. Whilst it is good to be inspired by the holiness we see in others, we shouldn't simply try to copy them. Rather, we need to discern our own unique path, so that we bring out the best in ourselves rather than imitate something not meant for us.

Our own holiness is borne out by "living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves" (*GE*, 14). In whatever situation we are in, we are called to be holy, and Pope Francis seeks to give us some practical examples: in the way we care for each other in marriage; in the joyful living of a religious commitment; in our integrity in our work; in leading children to Jesus as parents or grandparents.



***It is often in small steps that we make progress on the path of holiness:*** in refusing to gossip; in that extra patience required with a child; in the kind encounter with a person in need. It may be doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way with great love. We work at holiness step-by-step.

***We are holy only because we share in God's holiness.*** It is God's grace that makes us capable of holiness. The grace of our Baptism and the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in us, and the Church gives us all we need to sustain us on this path, including the Scriptures and the Sacraments. Further, we are helped in our human weakness by the very life of the risen Jesus which he shares with us, leading us towards holiness even in our human weakness.

#### FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

- Q. Do you feel that you are on a path of holiness? What does this look like in your life?
- Q. Can you identify little steps in your life that are leading you to holiness? Can you name a situation / activity in your life through which you feel that you are growing in holiness?
- Q. Are there any situations in your life that you could approach with greater love?
- Q. Are you able to draw on God's grace in your everyday situations? How do you do this?

#### YOUR MISSION IN CHRIST

"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' 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. The contemplation of these mysteries ... leads us to incarnate them in our choices and attitudes" (*GE*, 20).

We are holy when we model our life on Christ, when we reflect Christ. This involves living as he did on earth with compassion and self-giving, and participating in our own dying and rising experiences which form the pattern of the Christian life. Pope Francis tells us that "***The Father's plan is Christ, and ourselves in him***" (*GE*, 21). The whole of our life, therefore, becomes a mission as we are called to go out to reflect Jesus in today's world.





***It is a personal summons: God wishes to speak to the world by your life*** and this requires firstly to listen to God to discern what this message is that you are to bring. What does Jesus expect in every moment, in every decision, so that you are able to live this mission that you have received?

Our identification with Christ necessarily involves our identification with his own mission to build the kingdom of God, a kingdom of love, justice and peace. So our path of holiness does not just take place only in quiet and solitude. It is integrated into our whole life and in our activity as we go about carrying out our mission. Of course, in today's busy world with all its distractions, moments of silence and heartfelt prayer before God are greatly needed as well. A spirit of holiness can fill both our activity and our solitude, so that every moment of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness.

As we grow in holiness, we bear greater fruit for the world. All the Baptised need to be empowered to bring the Good News as a light for the world wherever we find ourselves.

#### FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

- Q. Do I see my life as a 'mission'? What does this mean for me? What message does Jesus want to bring to the world by my life?
- Q. Taking the path of holiness involves following the way of Christ in all aspects of my life. Am I ready to follow the way of Jesus? What is involved in living this out?
- Q. Do I find it easier to find the path to holiness in activity or in silence?

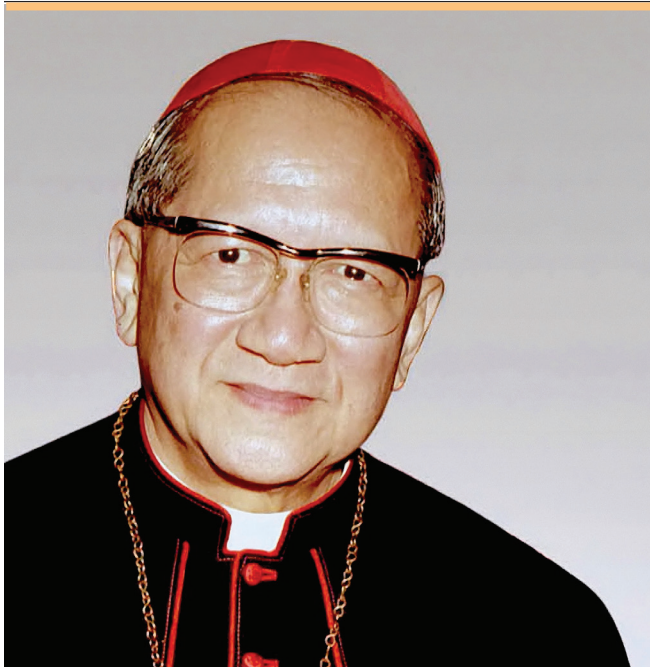
#### DO NOT BE AFRAID OF HOLINESS

Sometimes holiness can seem like something that can put restrictions on us. However, Pope Francis reminds us that being holy does not take away our vitality or joy. Rather, ***we become what God had in mind when we were created; we become faithful to our deepest selves and who we are meant to be.*** In fact, we become more alive and more human. A life in God sets us free from enslavement and is where we recognise our great dignity.

"Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God's grace. For in the words of León Bloy, when all is said and done, "the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a Saint"' (GE, 34).

#### FOR REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

- Q. How are you encouraged or discouraged by Pope Francis' words to take on the path of holiness? Is there a personal cost to this way of life?
- Q. How does being holy make us more human?
- Q. What does it mean to 'become a Saint'?
- Q. Can I say 'yes' to a path of holiness?



## CARDINAL FRANÇOIS-XAVIER NGUYỄN VAN THUÂN

Cardinal Văn Thuận (1928 - 2002) was a Vietnamese Cardinal, who was ordained to the priesthood in 1953, followed by study in Canon Law in Rome, and ordination as a Bishop in 1967. In 1975, he was imprisoned for 13 years, 9 of which were in solitary confinement in Hanoi. During this time, he kept his eyes on Jesus, and trusted that he would not be abandoned. “He refused to waste time waiting for the day he would be set free. Instead, he chose **“to live the present moment, filling it to the brim with love”**. He decided: “I will seize the occasions that present themselves every day; I will accomplish ordinary actions in an extraordinary way” (*GE*, 17). He was released from prison in 1988 to house arrest, but was allowed to visit his parents in Sydney in 1989. In 1991, he was expelled from Vietnam. Archbishop Văn Thuận was appointed Vice President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 1994 and became President in 1998. He became a Cardinal in 2001. Pope John Paul II preached at his funeral in 2002, describing the Cardinal’s secret as his “indomitable trust in God, nourished by prayer and suffering, accepted with love.”

**Q. How did Cardinal Van Thuân live out holiness? What message can I take from his life?**

## JOURNALING – WORKING AT HOLINESS IN MY LIFE

- What has spoken to me deeply during this reflection time?
- How do I see Jesus and my relationship with him differently?
- What is one new insight I have gained about holiness in my life?
- What is one thing I can practice this week as a result of my reflection?

*At the end of your journaling time, you may wish to share your insights with each other in the group.*

## FINAL PRAYER

Glory Be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.



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