

BISHOP BARRES' COMMENTARY ON  
POPE FRANCIS' APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

# *Rejoice and Be Glad*

— PART 1

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***On March 19, 2018, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Exhortation entitled Rejoice and Be Glad. It is a powerful meditation on our baptismal call to holiness and the Beatitudes. In this two-part series for January and February 2019, I select certain passages from the Exhortation and then offer extended meditations on these passages.***



"The Lord wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence." (1) "Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church." (9) "The Church needs passionate missionaries, enthusiastic about sharing true life. The saints surprise us, they confound us, because by their lives they urge us to abandon a dull and dreary mediocrity." (138)

The call to holiness and mission is a baptismal call. The call of the world, the flesh and the devil is a call, in the end, to a "bland and mediocre" existence. The call to be a saint is a call to adventurous living centered on intimacy

with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, an investment in the Kingdom of God Mission of the Catholic Church and the truths and principles that keep us centered and lead us to our eternal destiny, heaven.

Precisely because saints reject the bland and mediocre approach to life and embrace the Salt and Light adventurous living of holiness – they reveal why holiness is "the most attractive face of the Church" which in turn makes them passionate and effective evangelizers.

"The Saints next Door" (6)

Pope Francis uses this phrase to remind us that, while

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the world struggles with evil, it is also charged with the holiness of a wide range of people. Pope Francis points us to everyday holiness:

■ **The mother or father who runs through a challenging day of activities and still takes the time to listen to the dreams of their children.**

■ **The elderly person in a nursing home carrying the hard crosses of health challenges who radiates the presence of Christ to other nursing home residents and the staff.**

■ **The university student who radiates the presence of Christ in their dorm, the lecture halls, the University Student Center, and the Catholic chapel.**

■ **The professional who mentors the younger generation of professionals with the relational nuances of the Salt and Light of the Gospel.**

■ **The next door neighbor who is a joy to run into each day.**

These are the expressions of everyday holiness. These are “the saints next door.” Pope Francis encourages us to recognize and celebrate the holiness of people we meet and talk with each day.

“The genius of woman is found in feminine styles of holiness.” (12)

In addition to the great women Doctors of the Church, Pope Francis recognizes the critical leadership of women and remembers “all those unknown or forgotten women, who, each in her own way, sustained and transformed families and communities by the power of their witness.” (12)

Edith Stein was a Jewish German philosopher who discovered the works of St. Teresa of Avila and embraced the Catholic faith and a cloistered Carmelite vocation. Her feminine genius was expressed in philosophical scholarship (she apprenticed with the philosopher Husserl) and Carmelite mysticism. She died at Auschwitz.

*“The beauty of the saints is that their lives influence and inspire people centuries after their death.”*

Pope Francis uses one of her great observations about the impact of holiness on world history: “The greatest figures of prophecy and sanctity step forth out of the darkest night. But for the most part, the formative stream of the mystical life remains invisible. Certainly the most decisive turning points in world history are substantially co-determined by souls whom no history book ever mentions. And we will only find out about those souls to whom we owe the decisive turning points in our personal lives on the day when all that is hidden is revealed.” (8)

“Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel.” (19)

All of us have been born in a certain moment of history in a certain country in a certain family. The Holy Spirit is at work within us from the beginning as we live our particular and unique mission for Christ and the Church in the context of our shared communal mission for the Church at our particular moment in Church and world history.

There is so much diversity among the saints and they live so many dimensions and nuances of the Gospel.

We discover, as we read their lives and their works, how the Holy Spirit conducted their life journeys as the Spirit was conducting the life journeys of those around them and the entire Church.

The beauty of the saints is that their lives influence and inspire people centuries after their death.

St. Peter teaches us to bounce back and begin again after we have sinned and betrayed Christ. St. Paul holds a mirror to our lives to challenge us to conversion and to dedicate our lives to evangelizing missionary activity.

St. Ambrose teaches us to mentor people spiritually. St. Augustine teaches us to turn from the world, the flesh and the devil and to discover who we really are and how our talents are to be invested through intimacy with Christ.

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches us to give Glory to God by embracing holiness, and the relationship between faith and reason to evangelize.

St. Thomas More, the Patron of Statesmen, Politicians and Lawyers, and St. John Fisher teach us the humility, fortitude and interior life necessary for martyrs to render their witness to the Splendor of Catholic Truth in history.

St. Charles Borromeo, St. Philip Neri, St. Ignatius of Loyola, Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman and St. John Paul II teach us the relationship between ongoing Church reform and our own individual conversions and our full embrace of the ecclesial mission designed for us by the Holy Spirit.

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, though not a dogmatic theologian, focused her heroic mysticism on the indwelling of the Trinity in the human soul. She urges us to have a Trinitarian spiritual and missionary life. †

