



YOUR COMMUNITY
HOLINESS AND MISSION

BISHOP BARRES' COMMENTARY ON
POPE FRANCIS' APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

Rejoice and Be Glad

— PART 2

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.



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"Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy." (32)

All of us, to some extent, are afraid deep down of the radical call to holiness in our lives. We resist change generally and a big part of us does not want to breach the compromises we

have made that have led to our spiritual mediocrity. There are dimensions of the seven capital sins — pride, anger, lust, greed, sloth, envy, gluttony — and their rhythm in our lives that we do not want to surrender.

Pope Francis is making a simple point. Confront the fear of holiness and confront its roots. Believe deeply that the Holy Spirit has the power to make us radically holy right in the midst of our characteristic failures, falls and sins.

And realize on the practical and motivational level, that our enthusiasm for life, for our marriages, our families, our vocations and our career paths will be enhanced and illumined if we constantly recommit

ourselves to holiness. Our energy, vitality and joy for life will not be diminished but only deepen and expand.

"Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God's grace." (34)

This moving passage reminds us that each of us has many weaknesses, many compromises with the capital sins. We can so easily reason that real holiness in our lives is not possible. There are too many temptations and too many distractions, too many superficial appeals and temptations of the culture.

But Pope Francis shows that God's grace seeks our weakness, embraces our weaknesses and our failures. The power of the Holy Spirit enters the deepest dimensions of our weaknesses, touches them, heals them and transforms them.

The saints are so very aware of their weaknesses and are humble because of the weaknesses. These weaknesses, instead of causing discouragement, strengthen the saints to trust completely in the power of God.



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“Even when someone’s life appears completely wrecked, even when we see it devastated by vices or addictions, God is present there.” (42)

Right in the midst of the Long Island and national Opioid Crisis and the tragic overdose deaths of young people and older adults, Pope Francis’ words here are words of great encouragement and support to our recovering community, their family, friends and all of us. In a certain sense, all of us are “recovering.”

Self-destructive decisions in life always affect families and larger communities. The path of self-destruction is a hurricane of devastation. The prodigal son chose this path, its illusory pleasure, its alienation from others and oneself, its constant deceit and manipulation of the truth.

Still, Pope Francis reminds us of the hope and mercy that our Lord offers us at every moment, at every one of the crossroads of life. And he reinforces that this is especially true when a person is at the worst and most painful moments of addiction, when it seems as if a life has been “wrecked.”

The Risen Christ and the light that streams from his glorified wounds emerges from the wreckage of our lives to lead us and guide us to the

path of holiness and Eternal Life.

“In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives.” (63)

Pope Francis’ *Rejoice and Be Glad* is a meditation on the Beatitudes. He analyzes and helps us to pray each Beatitude and realize how each Beatitude captures a critical dimension of Christ.

He ends each meditation on a particular Beatitude with a summary statement:

- **Being poor of heart: that is holiness. (70)**
- **Reacting with meekness and humility: that is holiness. (74)**
- **Knowing how to mourn with others: that is holiness. (76)**
- **Hungering and thirsting for righteousness: that is holiness. (79)**
- **Serving and acting with mercy: that is holiness. (82)**
- **Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love: that is holiness. (86)**
- **Sowing peace all around us: that is holiness. (89)**
- **Accepting daily the path of the Gospel even though it may cause us problems: that is holiness. (94)**

With simple and direct language, Pope Francis urges us to pray and live the Beatitudes as a way to embrace the holiness we are all called to.

“The saints do not waste energy complaining about the failings of others; they can hold their tongue 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) (116)

People can become addicted to complaining about others. Finger-pointing and the critical spirit is so often our defense mechanism against the call to holiness. A heart that is humble and meek and yet strong, centered and balanced is focused on repentance and contrition. When we are humble, we are much more effective in serving people. We choose the humble spirit of the publican, rather than the self-righteous, ego-centered spirit of the Pharisee.

“Humility can only take root in the heart through humiliations. Without them, there is not humility or holiness. If you are unable to suffer and offer up a few humiliations, you are not humble and you are not on the path to holiness. The holiness that God bestows on his Church comes through the humiliation of his Son. He is the way. Humiliations make you resemble Jesus; it is an unavoidable aspect of the imitation of Christ.” (118)

We can obsess over humiliations and contradictions, real or imagined, for weeks, months, decades and years. The ego and pride that we nurse can so easily prevent us from opening up to the spirit of holiness and mission we are called to. Forgiveness and Mercy open the doors of holiness.

“Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the saints are joyful and full of good humor.” (122)



Pope Francis has pulled a spiritual judo move on the lyrics from an old Billy Joel song: "I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints." Sin is the essence of self-destruction. There is nothing humorous about a person caught in the sinful spiral of self-destruction. In contrast, the person who deep down wants holiness, wants to be a saint, experiences failures and falls, and gets back up — that person does not take themselves too seriously and often has a fun and life-giving sense of humor that puts people at ease and opens them up to evangelizing conversations.

The greatest joy and laughter of the Gospel comes from the depths of a pure, single-minded soul on Fire with the Joy and Laughter of the Trinity present in the depths of their soul.

How much humor in the contemporary world is sarcastic, uncharitable and at the expense of others. How much humor is coarse, relying on the cheap, uncreative laugh of crudity, rather than the humor that binds us together and expresses the

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union and communion of the Church's mission.

Our senses of humor, when grounded in holiness, help us to be instruments of union and communion.

"Holiness is boldness, an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world." (129)

St. John Paul II said that saints respond heroically to the universal call to holiness and mission.

Time stops for no one. Generations come and go. Few are remembered at a deep level. The holiness of the saints always lives on. Let's have the long view. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us. ✝



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TO MISS THE OVER-THE-TOP,
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A FEW OF THE GEMS.**



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