

POPE FRANCIS GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE



ON THE CALL TO HOLINESS
IN TODAY'S WORLD

Apostolic Exhortation



Part 4

**St Columba's, Culloden
Wednesday 29 August 2018**

Chapter Four: Signs of Holiness in Today's World

110. Within the framework of holiness offered by the Beatitudes and Matthew 25:31-46, I would like to mention a few signs or spiritual attitudes that, in my opinion, are necessary if we are to understand the way of life to which the Lord calls us.

111. The signs I wish to highlight are not the sum total of a model of holiness, but they are five great expressions of love for God and neighbour that I consider of particular importance in the light of certain dangers and limitations present in today's culture.

Perseverance, Patience and Meekness

112. The first of these great signs is solid grounding in the God who loves and sustains us. This source of inner strength enables us to persevere amid life's ups and downs, but also to endure hostility, betrayal and failings on the part of others.

115. Christians too can be caught up in networks of verbal violence through the internet and the various forums of digital communication. Even in Catholic media, limits can be overstepped, defamation and slander can become commonplace, and all ethical standards and respect for the good name of others can be abandoned.

116. 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.

118. Humility can only take root in the heart through humiliations. Without them, there is no 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.

Joy and a Sense of Humour

122. Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the saints are joyful and full of good humour. Though completely realistic, they radiate a positive and hopeful spirit.

Cf. Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Gaudete Domino* (On Christian Joy), 1975: "In essence, Christian joy is the spiritual sharing in the unfathomable joy, both divine and human, which is in the heart of Jesus Christ glorified."

126. Christian joy is usually accompanied by a sense of humour. We see this clearly, for example, in Saint Thomas More, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Philip Neri. Ill humour is no sign of holiness.

"A heart filled with joy is more easily made perfect than one that is sad." (Saint Philip Neri)

Boldness and Passion

129. Holiness is also parrhesía: it is boldness, an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world.

134. Like the prophet Jonah, we are constantly tempted to flee to a safe haven. It can have many names: individualism, spiritualism, living in a little world, addiction, intransigence, the rejection of new ideas and approaches, dogmatism, nostalgia, pessimism, hiding behind rules and regulations. We can resist leaving behind a familiar and easy way of doing things.

137. Complacency is seductive; it tells us that there is no point in trying to change things, that there is nothing we can do, because this is the way things have always been and yet we always manage to survive.

138. We are inspired to act by the example of all those priests, religious, and laity who devote themselves to proclamation and to serving others with great fidelity, often at the risk of their lives and certainly at the cost of their comfort. Their testimony reminds us that, more than bureaucrats and functionaries, 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.

In Community

140. When we live apart from others, it is very difficult to fight against concupiscence, the snares and temptations of the devil and the selfishness of the world. Bombarded as we are by so many enticements, we can grow too isolated, lose our sense of reality and inner clarity, and easily succumb.

Sharing the word and celebrating the Eucharist together fosters fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community. It also gives rise to authentic and shared mystical experiences. (142)

The common life, whether in the family, the parish, the religious community or any other, is made up of small everyday things. (143)

144. Let us not forget that Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details.

In Constant Prayer

we should remember that holiness consists in a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration. The saints are distinguished by a spirit of prayer and a need for communion with God. (147)

Trust-filled prayer is a response of a heart open to encountering God face to face, where all is peaceful and the quiet voice of the Lord can be heard in the midst of silence. (149)

152. I ask that we never regard prayerful silence as a form of escape and rejection of the world around us.

153. Nor does history vanish. Prayer, because it is nourished by the gift of God present and at work in our lives, must always be marked by remembrance. The memory of God's works is central to the experience of the covenant between God and his people. God wished to enter history, and so our prayer is interwoven with memories.

154. Prayer of supplication is an expression of a heart that trusts in God and realizes that of itself it can do nothing. .. Let us not downplay prayer of petition, which so often calms our hearts and helps us persevere in hope. Prayer of intercession has particular value, for it is an act of trust in God and, at the same time, an expression of love for our neighbour. .. Intercessory prayer is an expression of our fraternal concern for others, since we are able to embrace their lives, their deepest troubles and their loftiest dreams.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In no. 142, Pope Francis quotes the beautiful passage from St. Augustine's Confessions about his conversation with his mother, St. Monica, shortly before she died. Try reading this while thinking about your own departed loved ones, imagining them in the presence of the Lord. How does the hope of eternal life sustain us on our journey?
2. "Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details" (no. 144). In reading the list of details that the pope mentions here, how can you apply that list in your own life?
3. Which of the various aspects of prayer that the pope discusses do you find most helpful in your own prayer life?

For Personal Prayer and Meditation

Pick one of the virtues mentioned by Pope Francis, and meditate on a Scripture passage in connection with it. Ask the Holy Spirit to form that virtue in you.

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father,
we pray that the whole Church will devote herself anew
to promoting the desire for holiness.
May the Holy Spirit pour out upon us a fervent longing
to be saints for the greater glory of God,
and let us encourage one another in this effort.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.