

# S A N Y A S A Journal of Consecrated Life

**"Rejoice and Be Glad"**

**Pope Francis' Call for Holiness of Life**

*(Reflections on the Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate of Pope Francis)*



Vol. XIV, No. 2, July - December 2019

# **SANYASA**

## **JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE**

---

Vol. XIV, No. 2

July – December 2019

---

### **“Rejoice and Be Glad”**

**Pope Francis’ Call for Holiness of Life**

*(Reflections on the Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate of Pope Francis)*

**SANYASA**

**Institute of Consecrated Life**

Carmelaram Post, Bangalore – 560 035, Karnataka, India

## **SANYASA Journal of Consecrated Life**

A biannual published by Sanyasa: Institute for Consecrated Life, Bangalore, managed by the Claretian Missionaries, in view of fostering theological reflection on the life and mission of consecrated life in all its aspects, and in its essential relationship with other forms of Christian life in the Church, with specific reference to the Indian and Asian Reality.

### **Chief Editor**

Arul Jesu Robin, CMF

### **Executive Editor**

S. Devadoss, CMF

### **Advisory Board**

Felix Toppo, SJ (*Bishop, Jamshadpur*)

Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, CMF (*Professor, ITVR, Madrid*)

Diarmuid O'Murchu, MSC (*Author and Lecturer, London*)

Joe Mannath, SDB (*Executive Secretary, National CRI, Delhi*)

Joseph Mattam, SJ (*Professor Emeritus, Gujarat Vidya Deep, Ahmedabad*)

Shanthi, SAB (*Superior General, Sisters of St. Anne of Bangalore*)

Serena, MSA (*Principal, Sophia College, Ajmeer*)

V. Lawrence, CMF (*Delegate Superior, Kolkatta Delegation, Kolkatta*)

### **Editorial Board**

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF

Paulson Veliyannoor, CMF

S. Devadoss, CMF

Jacob Arakkal, CMF

George Lanithottam, CMF

Pushpa Joseph, FMM

Samuel Canilang, CMF

### **Review Editor**

George Panthalanickal, CMF

### **Circulation Manager**

George Panthalanickal, CMF

Manuscripts for publication, books for review should be addressed to: **The Executive Editor**, and business communications (correspondence, subscription, change of address) to: **The Circulation Manager**

SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Sanyasa, Carmelaram Post

Bangalore – 560 035, Karnataka, India

Tel: 080 – 28439259; 28439944; Mobile: 099 6416 1332

E-mail: [sjbancmf@gmail.com](mailto:sjbancmf@gmail.com); [sanyasac@gmail.com](mailto:sanyasac@gmail.com)

Web: [www.sanyasa.com](http://www.sanyasa.com)

*Published by SANYASA: Institute of Consecrated Life, Bangalore  
in collaboration with Claretian Publications, Bangalore, India*

## CONTENTS

Editorial.....	161
<i>Dr. M. Arul Jesu Robin, CMF</i> The Context and Overview of <i>Gaudete et Exsultate</i> .....	165
<i>Dr. José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF</i> Where Consecrated Life is... There is Joy... Holiness! Comments to <i>Gaudete et Exsultate</i> (“Rejoice and be Glad”) .....	177
<i>Sr. Marykutty Joseph, SCSA</i> New-Gnosticism – A Subtle Enemy of Holiness .....	199
<i>Sr. Sylvie Rodrigues</i> Neo-Pelagianism – A Subtle Enemy of Holiness.....	205
<i>Dr. Xavier E. Manavath, CMF</i> Holiness as Living the Beatitudes .....	271
<i>Sr. Ruby, OSA</i> Signs of Holiness in Today’s World.....	231
<i>Sr. Stella Baltazar, FMM</i> Life of Holiness – A Constant Battle (Arise and Shine – You are the Light Bearer) .....	247
<i>Sr. Irene Leena Pais, UFS</i> The Weapons Necessary for Holiness of Life .....	259
<i>Dr. A. Pushparajan</i> Pope Francis’ Call to Holiness in the Modern World.....	273
<i>Dr. James Niravath, OCD</i> Gaudete et Exultate – A Guide to Consecrated Life .....	287



# EDITORIAL

## EXTRAORDINARY MISSIONARY MONTH OF OCTOBER 2019

The Vatican on 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2019 released the message of Pope Francis for this year's World Mission Sunday, which falls on the penultimate Sunday of October every year. It is a letter which calls our attention in a very special way. World Mission Sunday in 2019 falls on 20<sup>th</sup> October. Instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1926, the annual day encourages prayers, cooperation and help for missions as well as reminding Christians about the fundamental missionary character of the Church and of every baptized person.

This year's mission month October is not like other years normal event. It is very significant. To celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pope Benedict XV's Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, Pope Francis announced that October 2019, will be an *Extraordinary Missionary Month*.

### **The Theme**

The theme of the Mission's Extraordinary Month is "Baptized and Sent: Christ's Church on Mission in the World," stressing that "the mission is understood as a proposal of faith that God makes to man."

The theme of this Extraordinary Missionary Month aims at awakening the awareness of the *missioadgentes*, and reinvigorating the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel with new enthusiasm. The theme combines the pastoral concern of Pope Benedict XV in *Maximum Illud* with the missionary vitality expressed by Pope Francis in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: "Missionary action is the paradigm of every work of the Church" (EG 15).

### **The Website**

"An Website site was created to promote and animate the Extraordinary Mission Month of October 2019, in order to contribute, through the multi-media contents that will be inserted there, to inspire the times of prayer and reflection on the *Missioad Gentes* of all Christians." The site has sections dedicated to particular themes where important texts of the Magisterium and of the Pontifical Missionary Works will be available. There are rubrics dedicated to "Witnesses," with stories of Blesseds, Saints, and Martyrs of yesterday and today; to "Formation," with texts that

can inspire the missionary animation; the “Voice of the World” section, dedicated to today’s mission with testimonies and writings of missionaries and directors of the Pontifical Missionary Works of different countries, as well as the Guide of the Extraordinary Missionary Month of October 2019.

## **The Logo**

A specially conceived logo for the Extraordinary Missionary Month represents “a missionary cross whose traditional colors recall the five Continents.” “The Cross is the instrument and the effective sign of communion between God and men for the mission’s universality: it is luminous, colored, a sign of victory and resurrection.” The words “Baptized and Sent,” which accompany the image, point out the “two characteristic elements of every Christian: Baptism and proclamation.

The cross’ colors have a particular significance. “The red recalls the blood of the Martyrs, seeds of a new life in the Christian faith. The green is the color of life and symbolizes growth, fertility, youth, and vitality. Green is also the color of hope, one of the three theological virtues. The white is a symbol of joy, the beginning of a new life in Christ. The yellow is the color of light. The blue is the color of the water of the life that quenches us and restores us on the way of God; it’s the color of our sky, a sign of God’s dwelling with us men.”

## **How to Live This Extraordinary Missionary Month**

There are four dimensions, specified by the Pope, to live more intensely the journey of preparation for the Extraordinary Missionary Month October 2019:

- A personal encounter with Jesus Christ living in His Church through the Eucharist, the Word of God, personal and communal prayer;
- Testimony: missionary saints, martyrs and confessors of the faith, as an expression of the Church scattered throughout the world;
- Missionary formation: biblical, catechetical, spiritual and theological;
- Missionary charity.

The second issue of Sanyasa journal for 2019 as usual carries the article of the seminar conducted as the celebration of the day of Consecration. The seminar took place on January 31<sup>st</sup> to February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2019. The main theme of the seminar was “Rejoice and Be Glad” – Pope Francis’ Call of Holiness of Life”. The seminar was a reflection on the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* of Pope Francis. Altogether, there were ten scholarly presentations on different aspects of the

Apostolic Exhortation from different scholars apart from the Panel Discussion at the end of the seminar.

The present journal carries the first article titled “The Context and Overview of *Gaudate et Exsultate*” by Dr. Arul Jesu Robin. He presents vividly the context in which this document was published by Pope Francis as his third apostolic exhortation. He also summarises the contents of the document pointing out the salient features.

The second article is on “The Concept of Holiness and Its Significance for Consecrated Life” by renowned scholar on the Theology of Consecrated Life Rev. Dr. Jose Cristo Rey G. Parades. He presents the Concept of holiness under five titles which deserves our attention. They are: a) The Call that excludes no one: from the great saints to the saints of our times; b) Threatened to holiness: enemies are Gnosticism, Pelagianism and ideologies; c) That is holiness!: the alternative of the beatitudes; d) The five virtues for our times and finally e) The three dynamisms: combat, vigilance and discernment.

The third article is on “Neo-gnosticism – A Subtle Enemy of Holiness” by Sr. Marykutty. She beautifully presents the traditional understanding of Gnosticism, Gnostic explanation of Christianity, Neo-gnosticism and finally Ecology and Gnosticism. She also points out how neo-gnosticism is a subtle enemy of holiness.

The next article is on the theme “Neo-pelagianism – A Subtle Enemy of Holiness” by Sr. Sylvie Rodrigues. She begins with what pelagianism is? Then, she proceeds with Pelagius’ doctrine of sin and grace; Pelagius and Augustine controversy; semi-Pelagianism and finally contemporary Pelagianism – A Subtle Enemy of Holiness.

Then, we have the fifth presentation on the theme, “Holiness as Practising the Beatitudes” by Dr. Xavier Manavath. He begins his paper with clearing off some of the misconceptions on holiness. Then, he goes on searching for an authentic face of holiness. Finally, drawing inspiration from Pope Francis, the author concludes presenting the beatitudes as the models of holiness.

The sixth article is by Sr. Ruby, OSM. She deals on the theme, “Signs of Holiness in Today’s World”. She begins explaining holiness from different angles. Then, she proceeds narrating the key element regarding the signs of holiness in today’s world. She also localises the theme by presenting the invitation to holiness for the Indian Church today. She concludes elucidating the challenges to holiness for the consecrated persons of today.

The title of the seventh paper is “Life of Holiness – A Constant Battle”. Sr. Stella Baltazar, FMM, begins presenting the battle ground of holiness. Then, she explains vividly how holiness consists in evolving into the divine. She goes on captivating the readers with the dream and cry of a struggling soul. She also proposes means for negotiating the challenging life journey. She concludes offering the Gospel values as inevitable mean for the battle of holiness.

The next paper is on “The Weapons Necessary for holiness of Life” by Sr. Irene Leena Pais, UFS. She begins presenting the possible temptations to holiness where she brings out the world, the devil and the flesh. She also points out the need to possess the gift of discernment. She proposes the presence of God, the Word of God, the sacraments of the Eucharist and reconciliation, prayer, examination of Conscience, spiritual direction, spiritual reading, genuine relationships, Marian devotion, life in the Holy Spirit, a martyrdom of 24x7, self-control, perseverance, patience and meekness, community life, life of credibility, transformative power of charity and a spirituality of creation as possible means for holiness of life.

The last but one article is on “Pope Francis’ Call to Holiness in the Modern World” by Dr. A. Pusparajan. His presentation has two parts. In the first part, the author offers the modern world as the context for Pope’s call for holiness. In the second part, the author deals directly Pope Francis’ call for holiness of life. He concludes quoting French Novelist León Bloy: When all is said and done, “the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint” (cf. *GE* 34).

The last presentation is by Dr. James Niravath on the theme, “*Gaudete et Exsultate* – A Guide to Consecrated Life”. In the background of holiness according to Indian spirituality, the author explains the call within the call to be holy; holiness according to Canon Law; our journey towards holiness and the spiritual warfare. Finally, he relates the document with the consecrated life of today stressing on prayer life, community life and apostolic life.

We hope that these articles stimulate deep reflection and personal questioning and lead consecrated persons to a life of holiness and commitment. Have a pleasant reflective reading!

**M. Arul Jesu Robin, CMF**  
Chief Editor

## THE CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW OF *GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE*

Dr. M. Arul Jesu Robin

We shall begin our presentation with a few preliminary observations:

### *The Name of the Apostolic Exhortation*

The title of the document is *Gaudete et Exsultate* which means *Rejoice and Be Glad*. This title was taken from Matthew 5:12 where Jesus exhorts those who are persecuted or humiliated for his sake with these words: “rejoice and be glad.”

### *The Time of the Publication*

Pope Francis signed the exhortation on March 19, the feast of St. Joseph and Vatican released it on April 9, 2018. It is fitting that this document was released the day after Divine Mercy Sunday (8<sup>th</sup> April) as its crux is that the true heart of the Gospel can be found in responding to the Father’s merciful love for us by becoming His very mercy itself for others through the day in, day out of our lives. The true worship acceptable to God, Pope Francis says, is to be “single-minded and tenacious in practice of the works of mercy” (107) — living a life anchored in true mercy is, therefore, true holiness.

### *Apostolic Exhortation*

*Gaudete et Exsultate* is an apostolic exhortation. In ranking the authority of Church documents, a papal encyclical holds pride of place and usually concerns an aspect of Catholic doctrine. For example, the last papal encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, sought to further our understanding

*(M. Arul Jesu Robin is a Claretian Missionary. He holds a doctorate in Biblical Theology from the Gregorian University, Rome; a licentiate in Consecrated Life from Claretianum – Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life of the Pontifical Lateran University, Rome and a diploma in Formative Psychology from the School of Formators, Bangalore. He is involved in teaching and conducting seminars and retreats. He is an expert trainer in spoken English and English grammar. He is presently the Director of Sanyasa. He may be contacted at ajrobin@yahoo.com)*

of Catholic social teaching as it confronts modern environmental and technological issues.

An apostolic exhortation, on the other hand, does not hold equal weight with a papal encyclical, but is still of great importance. Most apostolic exhortations discuss aspects of our lived Catholic experience rather than highly theological or doctrinal concepts and issues. An apostolic exhortation is a type of document that ranks below an encyclical but above everyday papal homilies and speeches.

*Gaudete et Exsultate* (“Rejoice and be Glad”) is the third Apostolic Exhortation from Pope Francis. Other two Apostolic Exhortations are *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Amoris Laetitia*. *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) has been roundly praised as a “charter” for Pope Francis’ papacy, while *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) has been at the center of numerous controversies since its publication.

## 1. The Purpose of the Exhortation

Different from his other exhortations, Pope Francis says, “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.” (2). By saying that he was not writing a theological treatise on holiness, Pope Francis focused mainly on how the call to holiness is a personal call, something God asks of each Christian and which requires a personal response given keeping in mind one’s state in life, talents and circumstances.

The document is not an academic text but is an attempt to express the call to holiness in a practical way for today. Pope Francis who is often called a “man of Vatican II”, in *Gaudete et Exsultate* offers a powerful magisterial reflection on the Council’s “universal call to holiness”. In short, he has been systematically implementing the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) both by his words and his actions.

“The Lord wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence. The call to holiness is present in various ways from the very first pages of the Bible. We see it expressed in the Lord’s words to Abraham: “Walk before me, and be blameless” (Gen 17:1) (1). The Sermon on the Mount figures heavily into the document, providing a sort of “roadmap” to holiness.

The call to holiness is at the heart of Pope Francis’ efforts to renew the Church. He has repeatedly upbraided bishops and curial officials on the need to ensure that they themselves are living authentically Christian lives. *Gaudete et Exsultate* is a call to each one to rediscover and deepen one’s own vocation to holiness.

## 2. Historical Context

Before the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), many believed that the ‘call’ to holiness was basically reserved to consecrated people — priests, nuns, and those in “formal” service to the Church. However, with the proposal of the universal call to holiness at Vatican II, the current of thought around holiness took on a decidedly different tone. Holiness, the Council Fathers wrote, was for everyone, and “all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society” (*Lumen Gentium*, 40).

Pope Francis continues this train of thought in *Gaudete et Exsultate*, especially that holiness is not a lofty ideal. Rather, holiness is love lived to the full in the particular conditions and situations of every person’s life, through both large acts and small; and that love, for us to truly be able to call it “holy”, must necessarily effect positive change here on earth.

Francis is synthesizing current trends affecting us as modern people with particularly helpful insights from our “ever ancient, yet ever new” faith. This includes discussing areas we might not think of as traditional domains for the Pope to touch on, including the online realm and the problem of cyber bullying.

When reading this document, one can listen for the voices of not just Pope Francis, but many beloved Saints that inform his words and insights — ideas first formulated by St. Ignatius in his Spiritual Exercises and Rules for the Discernment of Spirits, St. Therese of Lisieux’s “Little Way” of trust and simplicity, St. Josemaria Escriva’s focus on the sanctification of daily life, and Jesus’ words to St. Faustina (Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to my mercy).

## 3. Why was this Exhortation?

Helping people to be holy is one of the Church’s main tasks, in every era, the mission of sanctification. This document is a manual for it. Pope Francis invites Christians to journey towards holiness in the concrete here and now of our daily lives, in small gestures and little things by God’s grace. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope spoke of the call to all the faithful to be missionaries. But *Gaudete et Exsultate* is about the mission at the heart of the call. Mission is being in relationship with Jesus Christ who invites us to be holy and enables to achieve that through his grace. All are called to be holy. Holiness is our destiny. It is what God has planned for us. It enables us to become who we really are.

#### 4. Newness of the Exhortation

This exhortation is new in many ways. It is different in tone and emphasis from the preceding documents. We shall present here a few novelties:

a) This document is Addressed *personally* to each and every one of us. Pope Francis uses informal second person singular expression *tu* (in Latin Languages) as if friends are taking and not *voi*.

b) This document is deliberately *lay* in its language and invitation, aimed at people who live in the world, who have jobs and families and busy with the pressures of lives. To be holy, does not need special education or qualifications, nor religious vows. What is needed is an open heart and a desire to spend time with the Lord in prayer and by reading the Gospel.

c) This document is very *practical*. Pope Francis explains how the journey to holiness is undertaken and how it makes us more alive and more human in a very practical manner.

#### 5. How can we be holy?

There is nothing new to the well-informed Catholics but only reminders. The means for holiness of life are prayer, frequency to the sacraments of Eucharist and confession, daily examination of conscience and regular reading of the Gospel. They enable us to identify ourselves with Christ — Conformity with Christ. They should not be mere “spiritual activities” but *actions rooted in mercy*. Spiritual authenticity is to be seen in how we become and act more humbly and more mercifully. Mt 5 (Beatitudes) and Mt 25 (Last Judgement) are Jesus’ paths to holiness. What matters is how we respond to the concrete needs of others, specially the poor, marginalised, unloved, unwanted and needy. Holiness involves believing, praying and doing without compartmentalising them.

Pope Francis offers us an alternative to false mercies and contemporary forms of spiritual heresy in *Gaudete et Exsultate*. “What must one do to be a good Christian in the 21st century?” is to walk a path centred deeply on the Beatitudes, with the “Great Commission” of Matthew 25 (“Whatsoever you did to the least of my brethren, you did it to me”).

#### 6. Two Ancient Heresies

The document speaks of two ancient heresies in their modern versions: Gnosticism and Pelagianism. A Document by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith *Placuit Deo* (it pleased God; To the Bishops of the Catholic Church On

Certain Aspects of Christian Salvation, on Feb 22, 2018) explains these two heresies in detail.

A new form of Pelagianism is one in which the individual, understood to be radically autonomous, presumes to save oneself, without recognizing that, at the deepest level of being, he or she derives from God and from others. According to this way of thinking, salvation depends on the strength of the individual or on purely human structures (*PD 4*)

A new form of Gnosticism puts forward a model of salvation that is merely interior, closed off in its own subjectivism. In this model, salvation consists in elevating oneself with the intellect beyond “the flesh of Jesus towards the mysteries of the unknown divinity” (*PD 4*). At the heart of Gnosticism is the belief that the material world is bad and the spiritual realm is good. Contradicting the Genesis account of Creation where God describes the material world as “very good”, Gnostics viewed the material world as irredeemable, and sought to focus solely on things of the spirit. The goal for the Gnostics was to escape our inferior bodies and reach new spiritual heights through a special secret knowledge given to a few select people. This knowledge was given by Jesus and through learning and living it, you would receive salvation. Given that Gnostics hated all things physical, they maintained that Christ wasn’t really incarnated, but purely a spiritual being. It may have looked like he had a body, but this was just an illusion. He actually came to save people from their bodies.

Pope Francis, the document says, “often has made reference to the two tendencies,” toward overconfidence in one’s own powers and belief in the possibility of salvation through inner illumination that denies the order of creation. In fact, they are ways of seeking salvation not through the power of Christ but through the power of ideas or human effort. We are saved — we become holy — not by our own sophisticated ideas or strong efforts but by being constantly open to the assistance God offers us, in our weakness. We are justified not by our works and efforts but by the grace of God, who always takes the initiative. Becoming holy is about a progressive transformation in response to God’s free gift freely accepted and received by us.

### ***6.1 Pope’s Attack on “New Pelagians”***

“Not infrequently, contrary to the promptings of the Spirit, the life of the Church can become a museum piece or the possession of a select few. This can occur when some groups of Christians give excessive importance to certain rules, customs or ways of acting. The Gospel then tends to be reduced and constricted,

deprived of its simplicity, allure and savour. This may well be a subtle form of pelagianism, for it appears to subject the life of grace to certain human structures. It can affect groups, movements and communities, and it explains why so often they begin with an intense life in the Spirit, only to end up fossilized... or corrupt” (58). Pope Francis warns against the “new Pelagians” in the Church not anyone or any group in particular but anyone with tendencies such as an obsession with the law, a punctilious concern with liturgy, doctrine and prestige, and so on. He is not, obviously, saying liturgy and doctrine are unimportant; but where Catholics become obsessive about them, it can be a sign that they are falling into Gnostic or Pelagian attitudes.

### **7. Pope’s Condemnation of Gossiping**

“This Beatitude (Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children on God) makes us think of the many endless situations of war in our world. Yet we ourselves are often a cause of conflict or at least of misunderstanding. For example, I may hear something about someone and I go off and repeat it. I may even embellish it the second time around and keep spreading it... And the more harm it does, the more satisfaction I seem to derive from it. The world of gossip, inhabited by negative and destructive people, does not bring peace. Such people are really the enemies of peace; in no way are they ‘blessed’” (cf. *GE* 87).

Pope Francis has often talked before also about gossip, and has referred to it as a form of violence (gossip of terrorism) that destroys communities, sowing division and suspicion. The danger is greater now because modern social media (fake news) make it so easy to spread false information (cf. *GE* 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. The result is a dangerous dichotomy, since things can be said there that would be unacceptable in public discourse, and people look to compensate for their own discontent by lashing out at others. It is striking that at times, in claiming to uphold the other commandments, they completely ignore the eighth, which forbids bearing false witness or lying, and ruthlessly vilify others. Here we see how the unguarded tongue, set on fire by hell, sets all things ablaze” (*GE* 115). Pope reminds us of the Eighth Commandment’s warning against bearing false witness. On the positive side, he uses this as a very practical example of somebody who is on the road to holiness: he or she refrains from engaging in and repeating gossip.

## 8. Encountering a Homeless Person

If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian! Can holiness somehow be understood apart from this lively recognition of the dignity of each human being (*GE* 98)?

Pope Francis is not offering a precept, but clearly illustrates how holiness changes the way we view the world, and especially our fellow human beings. If we see this person not as a problem but as a brother or sister in need, then we are seeing him/her, as it were, through the eyes of Christ. It's a sign of our growth in holiness.

## 9. The Issue of Abortion, Euthanasia and the Poor in General

The other harmful ideological error is found in those who find suspect the social engagement of others, seeing it as superficial, worldly, secular, materialist, communist or populist. Or they relativize it, as if there are other more important matters, or the only thing that counts is one particular ethical issue or cause that they themselves defend. Our *defence of the innocent unborn*, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection. We cannot uphold an ideal of holiness that would ignore injustice in a world where some revel, spend with abandon and live only for the latest consumer goods, even as others look on from afar, living their entire lives in abject poverty (*GE* 101).

Pope Francis is here criticising an unholy attitude which separates off one area of ethical concern from all the rest and absolutizes it. And he offers the very common example of a Catholic who believes passionately in the prolife cause while dismissing the social engagement of other Catholics as in some way 'political'. The call to holiness requires a larger view, so that loving the neighbour means being concerned for anyone whose human dignity is under threat. Two of many examples are a family forced to flee their home because of bloodshed, or someone who has been

trafficked into prostitution. Because we can't be equally concerned all the time with every threat to human dignity, we should be grateful that others are responding where we cannot.

## 10. The Relationship between the Issue of Migrants and Holiness

We often hear it said that, with respect to relativism and the flaws of our present world, the situation of migrants, for example, is a lesser issue. Some Catholics consider it a secondary issue compared to the “grave” bioethical questions. That a politician looking for votes might say such a thing is understandable, but not a Christian, for whom the only proper attitude is to stand in the shoes of those brothers and sisters of ours who risk their lives to offer a future to their children. Can we not realize that this is exactly what Jesus demands of us, when he tells us that in welcoming the stranger we welcome him (cf. Mt 25:35)? Saint Benedict did so readily, and though it might have “complicated” the life of his monks, he ordered that all guests who knocked at the monastery door be welcomed “like Christ”, with a gesture of veneration; the poor and pilgrims were to be met with “the greatest care and solicitude” (*GE* 102).

A similar approach is found in the OT: “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex 22:21). “When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Lev 19:33-34). This is not a notion invented by some Pope, or a momentary fad. In today's world too, we are called to follow the path of spiritual wisdom proposed by the prophet Isaiah to show what is pleasing to God. “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn” (58:7-8; *GE* 103).

Pope Francis encourages wealthier countries to be generous, and to see that immigrants can be integrated into the societies into which they come. He always talks about building bridges, and against walls to keep people out. He speaks of the importance of seeing migrants not as statistics but as people. The plight of migrants is not a ‘secondary’ or lesser ethical issue. The call to holiness is a call to put the Gospel into action, and that also means welcoming the foreigner (Mt 25:35).

## 11. Overview of the Exhortation

### 11.1 Introduction (§§1-2)

*GE* is meant to be practical: it is not “a treatise on holiness, containing definitions and distinctions helpful for understanding this important subject, or a discussion of the various means of sanctification.” Rather, it is a meditation on how to respond to Christ’s invitation to be saints: to “Rejoice and be glad,” (§1).

### 11.2 Chapter 1 (§§3-34): *The Call to Holiness*

In the first chapter, Pope Francis discusses the diversity of forms under which holiness appears: “We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness,” (§11). Besides saints and martyrs, Pope praises “the middle class of holiness”: the everyday sanctity of “those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile,” (§7).

He invokes the theme of the universal call to holiness, citing *Lumen Gentium* §11: “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”. Pope emphasizes the phrase “each in his or her own way,” for the diversity of forms of holiness means that Christians must discern how the Lord is calling each of them to holiness. While there are many good forms of life, every person has a unique vocation to which he or she is called by God. Pope Francis notes that Saint John of the Cross “preferred to avoid hard and fast rules for all. He explained that his verses were composed so that everyone could benefit from them “in his or her own way.” For God’s life is communicated “to some in one way and to others in another,” (§11).

Pope Francis makes specific mention of women in this section, both those holy women like Saint Hildegard of Bingen or Saint Teresa of Avila but also those “unknown or forgotten women” who nurture those around them in ways that we know have personally touched Pope Francis deeply (§12).

Contemplating the mysteries of Christ’s life, death and resurrection, “as Saint Ignatius of Loyola pointed out, leads us to incarnate them in our choices and attitudes,” (§20).

### 11.3 Chapter 2 (§§35-62): *Two Subtle Enemies of Holiness*

This chapter concerns “two false forms of holiness that can lead us astray: gnosticism and pelagianism,” (§35). Pope Francis notably underlines how these

tendencies draw oneself and others away from holiness. This section contains the most learned footnotes of the document, including citations of the Council of Trent; the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; the Second Synod of Orange; Saints Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Thérèse of Lisieux and Pope John Paul II and a dozen Scriptural citations. This section is more intellectual than the introduction to *GE* promises.

#### **11.4 Chapter 3 (§§63-109): In the Light of the Master**

Chapter 3 centers on the example of Jesus, particularly in the interpretation of the Beatitudes and Matthew 25. For while there “can be any number of theories about what constitutes holiness, with various explanations and distinctions [...] nothing is more enlightening than turning to Jesus’ words and seeing his way of teaching the truth,” (§63). Pope Francis writes, “Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23),” such that “The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card” (§63).

In this chapter, Pope Francis notes two “ideologies striking at the heart of the Gospel”: “those Christians who separate these Gospel demands from their personal relationship with the Lord, from their interior union with him, from openness to his grace,” and “those who suspect the social engagement of others, seeing it as superficial, worldly, secular, materialist, communist or populist”. The Church is more than an “NGO,” Pope Francis argues, but one should also affirm the good of one’s neighbor as integral to the Christian life. Pope Francis elaborates on this second point at some length, invoking St. Thomas Aquinas again to argue that “works of mercy towards our neighbour” give greater glory to God than even acts of worship (§106).

One of the most “Franciscan” moments in the text comes here:

Our defence of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection (§101).

Francis ends this chapter with a bold statement. A life spent meditating on the Beatitudes and Matthew 25 and the examples of the saints “will benefit us; they will make us genuinely happy” (§109).

### **11.5 Chapter 4 (§§110-157): Signs of Holiness in Today's World**

In Chapter 4, Pope Francis discusses five “great expressions of love for God and neighbour” that he considers to be “of particular importance in the light of certain dangers and limitations present in today’s culture.” Pope Francis first states these five attitudes negatively: “There we see a sense of anxiety, sometimes violent, that distracts and debilitates; negativity and sullenness; the self-content bred by consumerism; individualism and all those forms of ersatz spirituality — having nothing to do with God — that dominate the current religious marketplace (§111).

Then, he stated positively saying that the Christian should rather be patient and meek (§§112-121); joyful (§§122-128); bold and passionate (§§129-139); communal (§§140-146) and constantly prayerful (§§147-157). Pope Francis casts this chapter in terms of following and becoming more like Jesus, a life-long effort which leads us to and is sustained by the Eucharist:

### **11.6 Chapter 5 (§§158-201): Spiritual Combat, Vigilance, and Discernment**

Christian life is a constant battle. We need strength and courage to withstand the temptations of the devil and to proclaim the Gospel. This battle is sweet, for it allows us to rejoice each time the Lord triumphs in our lives (§158). Pope Francis continues that we “are not dealing merely with a battle against the world and a worldly mentality,” or “against our human weaknesses and proclivities. It is also a constant struggle against the devil, the prince of evil,” (§159). And the devil is real: “Hence, we should not think of the devil as a myth, a representation, a symbol, a figure of speech or an idea.”

The spiritual life demands vigilance and keeping our “lamps lit” (§164). Pope Francis ends the chapter by posing a question: “How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit or if it stems from the spirit of the world or the spirit of the devil?” The answer is discernment. Discernment, the Pope writes, should be exercised in matters great and small. Discernment is “more than intelligence or common sense. It is a gift” from the Holy Spirit (§166). Indeed, while “spiritual discernment does not exclude existential, psychological, sociological or moral insights [...] it transcends them.”

Nor are the Church’s sound norms sufficient. We should always remember that discernment is a grace. Even though it includes reason and prudence, it goes beyond them, for it seeks a glimpse of that unique and mysterious plan that God has for each of us, which takes shape amid so many varied situations and limitations (§170).

Finally, those conversant in Ignatian spirituality will appreciate the Pope's admonition to pray "in dialogue with the Lord, a sincere daily "examination of conscience" (§169).

***11.7 Conclusion (§§176-177) with Hail Mary***

Pope Francis concludes by calling on Mary's intercession to help all walk with Jesus toward holiness. Mary is a model for that holiness: "she lived the Beatitudes of Jesus as none other." Her example is one of joy, discernment and suffering, and fidelity: "Mary is the saint among the saints, blessed above all others." If we follow her example, Pope Francis urges, "we will share a happiness that the world will not be able to take from us."

## WHERE CONSECRATED LIFE IS...THERE IS JOY... HOLINESS! COMMENTS TO *GAUDETE ET EXULTATE* ("REJOICE AND BE GLAD")

José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF

Although one of the objectives of consecrated life is "the sanctification of those who belong to it", the truth is that the horizon of holiness has been blurring among us. In some institutes, consecrated people hardly speak of "sanctity". It has become an obsolete language. It may have some reasons. So, we need to recover the vocation to holiness from new perspectives.

On 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2018, on the feast of St. Joseph, the sixth anniversary of his pontificate, Pope Francis gave us his third apostolic exhortation, "Call to Holiness in Today's World", which he has entitled *Gaudete et Exultate (GE)*; and, at the same time, he invited us to plead with the Holy Spirit to instill in us an intense desire to be saints for the greater glory of God. He asked us to encourage each other mutually in this attempt, so that we could share that happiness that the world will not be able to take away from us.

During the year of consecrated life, Pope Francis affirmed categorically: "Where consecrated life is, there is joy".<sup>1</sup> And in this apostolic exhortation, I could add: "where the consecrated life is, there is holiness": *Gaudete et Exultate*. Holiness is presented from a beautiful perspective: the face of happiness.

Pope Francis structures his pontifical exhortation in five parts, that I would translate for the consecrated life in the following subtitles:

- **The Call that excludes no one:** from the great saints to the saints of our times.
- **Threatened to holiness:** enemies are Gnosticism, Pelagianism and ideologies.

*José Cristo Rey García Paredes, CMF, is a Claretian Missionary, born in Spain. He is a professor catedrático at the Pontifical University of Salamanca (Spain) in the Institute of Religious Life (Madrid). He has been teaching theology in various theological faculties a broad and also in ICL: Institute of Consecrated Life – Sanyasa, Bangalore. He has authored over 100 books and numerous articles. His major contribution to the theology of consecrated life: Fundamental Theology of the Forms of Christian Life in two volumes and Theology of Religious Life: Covenant and Mission in five volumes. He can be contacted at cmfyr44@gmail.com).*

- **That is holiness!** : the alternative of the beatitudes.
- **The five virtues for our times**
- **The three dynamisms:** combat, vigilance and discernment

## I. THE CALL THAT EXCLUDES NO ONE: FROM THE GREAT SAINTS TO THE PRESENT ONES OF OUR TIMES

Pope Francis recovers the conciliar theme: “universal call to holiness” (*Lumen Gentium*, chapter 5). And it makes us see how holiness of which we are heirs is within the reach of all the baptized, although each one in his own way and following his own process. On the other hand, it tells us that holiness is closely linked to the mission.

### 1. The Holy Inheritance, Sacred Holiness

They have preceded us in the consecrated life “such a huge cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1) that encourage us not to stop on the way and stimulate us to continue walking towards the goal: from the consecrated virgins, by following Antony the Abbot and Pacomius, even the most recent founders and foundresses; but also, and in a very special way, the innumerable martyrs in the consecrated life, who offered their own lives for others unto death. Nor should we forget many of our sisters and brothers who even without being canonized, have been and are a holy harvest of the Spirit.

However, Pope Francis shows us how the holiness is not only detected in heroic cases, but in “the next door”, in those people who live near us and they are a reflection of the presence of God; not only in the great saints, but also in those who are unknown or forgotten have brought to society the power of their testimony. Holiness is the most beautiful face of the Church and consecrated life. Also, outside the Church the Spirit arouses “signs of his presence”. It is “important not to reduce sanctity to individual “stars”, but to contemplate it in the space of “constellations”. Pope Francis expresses it as follows:

The Lord in the history of salvation has saved a nation. There doesn't exist as total identity without belonging to a nation. That is why; no one is saved alone, like an isolated individual, but God attracts us, considering, the complex web of interpersonal relationships that are established in the human community: God wanted to enter in a popular dynamic, in the dynamic of a people (*GE 6*).

There is no sanctity one alone, although that is the temptation: choose to follow your own path, without interference, without unwanted interference. Counting on

others entails an added effort and, at the same time, an uncertainty. In this sense the hermit would have it easier than the consecrated ones who live in community, in a congregation, or in an Institute.

We complain at times about the hindrance that involves the presence of brothers or sisters who, for example, do not value a prayer with creativity, discard poverty with greater radicalism, detest fraternal community meetings, block all initiative in order to achieve a spiritual project better for the community, they are unable to collaborate with others in a pastoral program, etc. Would not it be much easier, to dispense with this community element and to follow one's own journey? No! The consecrated life itself is a pilgrimage in community through the path of sanctification. Life in communion and in community has an enormous sanctifying capacity. Every individualistic attempt on the spiritual path is misguided and does not take very far; and, above all, it does not respond to God's plan, as Jesus revealed it to us.

## **2. All are called to Holiness and Transformation**

“Be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:45; 1Pet 1:16).

“All the faithful Christians, of any condition and state, strengthened with so many and very powerful means of salvation, are called by the Lord, each one on his way, to the perfection of that holiness with which the Father himself is perfect” (LG11).

### *a) “Each One on His Way”*

God has a path and a unique project for each human being.

“No one will go,  
nor had anyone gone to God,  
on this road that I go.

For each one has a virgin path to God” (Leon Felipe).

Every believer must discern his “own way” and get the best out of himself, knowing that he is called by God and enabled by God to travel it (cf. *GE 7*).

Divine life is communicated to us in different ways. There are masculine and feminine styles of holiness; and also, others overcome the heterosexual binary: they all reflect the holiness of God. Holiness is not reserved for the elite of a certain Christian way of life such as ministerial or consecrated.

Are you consecrated? Be holy by living your surrender with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or your wife, as Christ did with the Church. Are you a worker? Be holy by honoring your work with honesty and competence in the service of the brothers. Are you a father, grandmother or

grandfather? Be holy by patiently teaching children to follow Jesus. Do you have authority? Be holy by fighting for the common good and renouncing your personal interests (*GE* 14).

The grace of Baptism is in each one of us as a seed that wants to bear fruit. We have in us the power of the Spirit that makes it possible.

In the Church, made of saints and sinners, you will find everything you need to grow towards holiness. The Lord has filled her with gifts with the Word, the sacraments, the sanctuaries the life of the communities, the testimony of her saints, and a multiple beauty that comes from the love of the Lord, “as a bride adorned with her jewels” (Is 61:10) (*GE* 15).

*b) Holiness as a Process of Transformation*

Why have we been sent into existence? Because the Creator has destined us to follow a “path of holiness”! This path will lead us to fulfill in us the will of God and to collaborate so that his will may be done in our world through multiple gestures that configure “the holiness that God wants from us”: small gestures, minute details, make us grow in holiness. What seems insignificant in our eyes can be very great in the eyes of God.

The important thing is to take advantage of the opportunities that each day offers us and “live the present moment filling it with love.”

Holiness occurs in us, when we associate ourselves with the mysteries of Jesus’ life. That is precisely the goal of the great liturgical Year! The liturgy, with its cycles, sets before us a path of spirituality and mission, which, carried out by the Spirit, makes us go through all the mysteries of Jesus to identify with Him.

For this reason, in the consecrated life we attach great importance to the daily celebration of the Eucharist: an implicit way of asking us to participate in the entire liturgical year! This is how we are granted “to reproduce in our very existence different aspects of Jesus’ earthly life: his hidden life, his communitarian life, his closeness to the least, his poverty and other manifestations of his surrender for love.”

The progressive identification with Jesus makes it possible for our love to be as “Christ loving in us”. May the Holy Spirit pour out in our hearts and transform us in “a message that the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people.”

We are not saints for ourselves: “not everything a saint says Pope Francis, is fully faithful to the Gospel, not everything he does is authentic or perfect”; but holiness

is detected “in the totality of his life”, in all the way he has traveled, “in whom he reflects something of Jesus in the totality of his person”. Holiness is not found in each of the concrete acts, but in the totality of life. The dialogue of permanent life with the Spirit of the Father and of Jesus generates in us an almost imperceptible transformation, which overcomes our errors and bad moments and introduces us in a “way of love” (*GE* 23, 24).

### **3. Holiness in the Context of Mission**

Holiness is the response to Jesus’ command: “Seek above all the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mt 6:33). “To make present the Kingdom of God”, to establish the new and definitive covenant with all humanity and the cosmos, was the passion that mobilized the whole existence of Jesus. Holiness and Mission were in Jesus perfectly matched. There is no mission without holiness, or sanctity without mission.

Identification with Jesus and the Kingdom leads us to “encounter with each other”, to activity, to service. Authentic contemplation in the context of the Kingdom of God is “contemplation in the mission”: “We are called to live contemplation also in the midst of action, and we sanctify ourselves in the responsible and generous exercise of our own mission.”

The Kingdom of God consists of connecting everything that is disconnected, divided by the legion of demons. The Holy Spirit is the great protagonist of the mission and counts on our complicity and activity. There is no need to give in to the temptation to “relegate pastoral dedication or commitment in the world to a secondary place, as if they were” distractions “in the way of sanctification and inner peace”. We are asked to “be contemplatives in the mission”. Without spirituality it is not possible to participate in the *Missio Spiritus*, which translates into missionary, ecological spirituality, into the joy of love (cf. *GE* 28).

The connection with the Holy Spirit requires “moments of quietness, solitude and silence so that the voice of God may resound in us”. It is there where the great motivations are found to perform in depth in our own tasks; and not in the excited action, in the seduction produced by new technologies, or the absolutization of free time: all this deviates from an authentic collaboration with the Spirit in the Mission of God at this time.

We need a spirit of holiness that permeates solitude and service, intimacy and evangelizing task, so that each moment is an expression of love delivered under the gaze of the Lord. In this way, all the moments will be steps in our way of sanctification (*GE* 31).

Holiness does not devitalize, it is not inhuman. It is the design that makes possible the dream of God over each one of us. It is “being true to one’s self”, cultivating our own dignity, and being authentically human. Leon Bloy said, in life “there is only one sad thing that of not being saints.” Holiness makes us fruitful, creative, makes us aim higher. It is the Spirit who guides us.

## **II. THREATENED HOLINESS: GnosticISM, PELAGIANISM AND IDEOLOGIES**

The exhortation of Pope Francis evokes two ancient heresies that, according to him, are relevant even today: Gnosticism and Pelagianism. It is the heresies themselves that break the fabric of communion and that due to the strength of idolatrous attraction that resides in them and their ability to deceive “disguised as truth”. We must not forget, as history shows us, that these heresies exercised a special influence on the monastic life, and, perhaps, also today, on the various forms of consecrated life.

### **1. The Two Heresies: Installed in the Knowledge or in the Will**

The first heresy, *Gnosticism*, cites holiness and perfection in the ability to know: knowledge makes us holy. The second heresy, *Pelagianism*, cites holiness and the perfection of the ability to do: the will makes us holy. Both heresies eliminate grace and do not need the Spirit of holiness that pours into our hearts.

Both heresies break the covenant; “give rise” to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, where instead of evangelizing analyze what is done and classify others, and instead of facilitating access to grace, spend the energies in controlling.

In both cases neither Jesus Christ nor others are really important. They are two heresies centered on the human being, our possibilities from the autonomy. Really, they are interested neither in Jesus, nor in others.

### **2. Gnosticism in Consecrated Life Today**

There are people who think that holiness consists in the ability to know: biblical, theological, dogmatic, historical, liturgical and pastoral knowledge. It is about people affected by an inner and overlapping conceit, based on their knowledge or understandings; scholars are shown with multiple data; their conceit makes them think that they have nothing to learn from others, their investigations are enough. They feel “teachers”, not disciples.

To those who do not think like them, they consider them as ignorant or deviant. His intellectual world, however, is not incarnated, does not lead to a personal or

social transformation: “they do not touch the flesh of Christ”, they are like an “encyclopedia of abstractions”; “Tame the Mystery”:

Gnosticism supposes a faith enclosed in subjectivism, where only a certain experience or a series of reasoning and knowledge that supposedly comfort and enlighten, but ultimately the subject is closed in the immanence of his own reason or his feelings (*Evangelii Gaudium* 94).

This type of Gnosticism and intellectual arrogance can infect the consecrated: male and female professionals of theology, spirituality, liturgy, morality, or those who identify with a single thought and from it they try to control everything. They are people who “absolutize their own theories and force others to submit to them” (*GE* 39). St. John Paul II warned those who were acquiring a certain degree of theological-philosophical formation that they would not fall into the temptation to develop “a certain feeling of superiority with respect to others” (*GE* 45); On the contrary, the one who thinks that he knows, should be a reason to respond better to the love of God, because “you learn to live: theology and holiness are an inseparable binomial”. Pope Francis goes so far as to affirm that “Gnosticism is one of the worst ideologies”, especially when “it disguises itself as a disembodied spirituality”. What measures, the degree of holiness is not “the amount of data and accumulated knowledge”, but the capacity for incarnation, passion and, therefore, to recognize a world that exceeds “my poor world”.

In the consecrated life this ideology is present in certain “spiritual masters” who become “viral” at certain times and are followed by so many consecrated people eager for novelties. It gives the impression that such people find in these characters the “philosopher’s stone” of holiness, or of perfection, without perceiving how certain spiritual masters reveal their inner violence when their theory or practice is not strictly followed. They can control their followers. Such people may be “false prophets, who use religion for their own benefit, at the service of their psychological and mental elucubrations”.

### **Instead:**

Even when someone’s existence has been a disaster, even when we see him destroyed by vices or addictions, God is in his life. If we allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit more than by our reasoning, we can and must seek the Lord in all human life. This is part of the mystery that Gnostic mentalities end up rejecting, because they cannot control it (*GE* 42).

Who can boast of knowing everything? The Pope reminds us that “in the Church different ways of interpreting many aspects of the doctrine and of the Christian life coexist lawfully, which, in their variety,” help to explain better the rich treasure of the Word “. Our doctrine is not a closed system. It has dynamics that generate questions, doubts from people which cannot be ignored if we believe really in the principle of incarnation.

To avoid the temptation of Gnosticism, St. Francis of Assisi wrote to St. Anthony of Padua: “I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers so that in the study of it, do not quench the spirit of prayer and devotion.” And St. Bonaventure said: “The greatest wisdom that can exist is to disseminate fruitfully what one has to give, what has been given precisely to dispense. [...] Therefore, just as mercy is a friend of wisdom, greed is its enemy”; and he added: “There is an activity that joining with contemplation does not prevent it, but facilitates it, like the works of mercy and piety.”

### **3. The Pelagianism in the Consecrated Life Today**

There are people in consecrated life who are tempted today by the old heresy of Pelagianism: they defend that holiness does not come from knowledge, but from the life that one leads, from the strength of will and personal effort, from their own fulfillment. Such people rely only on their own strengths; they have a superiority complex. They are demanding of others, as if everything depended on their effort and commitment.

Pope Francis recalls the teaching of Saint Augustine: “God invites you to do what you can and pray for what you cannot”, or that text of Saint Paul: “It does not depend on desiring or running, but on God’s mercy” (Rom 9:16), or in the first letter of John: “He loved us first (1Jn 4:19). The grace of God cannot act in us if we do not recognize our limitations with sincerity, pain and supplication; otherwise we do not accept to be introduced in healing processes.

To live in the presence of God is to experience his love, his care, his closeness, his understanding towards our limits. It is not so much that God dwells in us, as we live in God. He is our temple: what I seek is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life (see Ps 27: 4).

“A day in your courts is worth more than a thousand in my house” (Ps 84:11).

In him we are sanctified. A teaching often forgotten tells us that we are not sanctified by our own works, but only “by God’s grace.” *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* also reminds us that the gift of grace “exceeds the capacities of intelligence and the

forces of the human will” and that “before God there is no right in the strict sense, any merit on the part of man. Between him and us inequality has no measure”.

The new Pelagianism manifests itself as:

- egocentric and elitist self-complacency,
- obsession with law,
- fascination for showing social and political conquests,
- ostentation in the care of the liturgy,
- the doctrine and prestige of the Church,
- vainglory linked to the management of practical matters, enraptured by the dynamics of self-help and self-referential realization,
- communities, groups and movements that so often begin with an intense life in the Spirit, and then end fossilized or corrupt.

These Christians do not allow themselves to be led by the Spirit in the way of love. Do we not detect similar attitudes among us, who belong to the consecrated life?

We have here a very strong spiritual call, both for the initial and for the continued formation: to overcome any idolatrous form of Gnosticism and Pelagianism!

#### **4. In an Unhealthy and Permanent Dissatisfaction**

For this reason in consecrated life, people and communities, must place ourselves in a “healthy and permanent satisfaction” and avoid double disconnection: the immanentist and the spiritualist:

- *The immanentist:* It should not be enough to alleviate or perform some good works. We must strive to promote social change, in which there is no exclusion. But for this we do not need to identify with ideologies of progress, which deprive us of the “luminous mystique” of Francis Assisi, Vicente de Paul, Maria Rafols and Teresa of Calcutta. Prayer, reading the Gospel and passion for God do not diminish our commitment to social change.
- *The spiritualist:* but we must not consider an ideal of holiness that ignores the injustice of the world also ideological that does not defend or commit to social change, which affects everyone and even makes life easier for future generations; that defends the innocent that has not been born and the life of the poor already born, that fight against the traffic of people, the euthanasia.

A commitment of sanctity that is especially interpellant for the consecrated life of our time is the welcoming of the foreigner, the immigrant, as we receive Jesus himself in every stranger (Mt 25:35). St. Benedict had assumed it without a twist and although that could “complicate” the life of the monks, he established that all the guests who presented themselves in the monastery would be welcomed “as Christ”, expressing it even with gestures of adoration and “with utmost care and solicitude.”

“Break your bread with the hungry, shelter the poor homeless, and cover the naked that you see and do not get away from your own. Then your light will rise like the dawn” (Is 58:7-8).

We do not have to evaluate our life solely from the liturgy and prayer or from certain ethical norms. We have to evaluate ourselves, first of all, for what we did with the others. Then prayer and worship and ethics are pleasing to our God. Mercy with others “is the main beam that sustains the life of the Church.”

### **III. THAT IS HOLINESS! THE ALTERNATIVE OF THE BEATITUDES**

Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we ask ourselves: what is holiness? There are various biblical, theological and spiritual explanations. Pope Francis chooses the simplest answer: the one that Jesus offers us in the Sermon on the Mount and condensed in the Beatitudes: a person “blessed” or “happy” is a “holy” person!

Holiness consists in entering into a bilateral and transforming covenant with God; In that intimate relationship, true happiness is experienced. In that holy mountain, Jesus “canonized” or “beatified” many suffering and struggling people who contemplate the world from mercy and purity of heart.

Acting like this, our Master did not need long and complicated processes. He acted as the true prophet of the Good News of the Kingdom for the poor (the *Mebasser*) that the deutero and trito-Isaiah preannounced. The real misfortune is not being part of an immense group of the blessed.

#### **1. Beatitudes: Anti-system Sanctity**

The beatitudes of Jesus present us with an alternative way of life. They are not the result of human effort, but of docility to the great Counselor and Teacher who is Jesus: He with his words hits us, challenges and demands us. They are the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit our inner Counselor, who energizes us, makes every divine promise a reality and frees us from weakness of selfishness, comfort and pride.

Here the consecrated life is the key to understanding the “evangelical counsels”. It is the Counselor that is more important than the “councils”. More important is the Giver than the gift. Instead, we have focused too much on the councils, on their characteristics and demands, on their regulations, and we have forgotten, that they are the counsels of Jesus - the great Counselor - updated and personalized for each one of us by the Holy Spirit — our Inner counselor — Without communion with the Counselor, the evangelical counsels become a dead letter, a mere law.

Seneca said that “the effect of wisdom is a continuous joy”. The gift of wisdom granted by the Spirit manifests itself as blessed holiness. And the philosopher Bergson noted that “nature warns us with a precise sign what is the expected destination: this sign is joy. The beatitudes are “like the identity card of the Christian” of the consecrated person. Every bliss draws in us some trait of the Master. True happiness consists in the harmony of all of them.

The Beatitudes present us with “another possible world”, another existential paradigm; they tell us that the happiness that we all seek has its source in God and that only the Spirit of Jesus can be sown in us:

We can only live them if the Holy Spirit invades us with all his power and frees us from the weakness of selfishness, of comfort and of pride (GE63).

The beatitudes challenge us and call us to a real change of life.

## **2. The Traits of a “Blessed”**

Let us look at the eight beatitudes of the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 5: 3-12), which outline the face of a consecrated life that can be defined as “blessed”:

a) *“Happy are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven”*

Pascal Bruckner spoke of the “misery of prosperity.” And Pope Francis points out the reason for “that miserable life”: those who place all security in wealth fall apart when it fails; who puts all his self-assurance is “rich in heart”: and by not leaving space for God, or for the brothers and sisters, he becomes incapable of enjoying the most beautiful and important things in life.

The evangelist Luke makes recipients of this first beatitude are the “poor” without further qualification (Lk 6:20); in this way he invites us to enter an austere and deprived life style, that shares with them what we have and that configures us with Jesus that “being rich he became poor” (2Co 8:9). The poor in spirit and in heart are open to the constant newness of the Kingdom of God and, therefore, they are happy and holy.

For Jesus holiness is to be poor in the heart.

b) *“Happy the meek, because they will inherit the earth”*

There is a reign of pride and vanity, where each one believes with the right to rise above others. “Human relationships are tinged — already from the origin (Cain and Abel) — of violence, incomprehension, envy, hatred: we classify others by their ideas, by their customs, and even by their way of speaking or dressing. In this realm, the human being is not happy: he lives tense, self-confident before others, and the result is fatigue and exhaustion.

The alternative that Jesus offers is condensed in that phrase: “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:29). Meekness is a gift of the Spirit (Gal 5:23) that leads us to know the limits and defects of ourselves and others with tenderness; that teaches us how to correct the brother — if we are ever worried about his bad deeds by approaching him “in a spirit of meekness” (Gal 6:1). We are also asked to defend our convictions and our faith, but “(1P 3:16) to deal with our adversaries with meekness (2 Tim 2, 25)”.

For Jesus, holiness is to react with humble meekness.

c) *“Happy are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”*

There are people who, in order not to cry, give themselves over to the good life, tend to ignore or avoid painful situations; they are dedicated to having fun. But there is an alternative “cry”: the bliss of tears. It is the cry of the heart of those who immerse themselves in the depths of life and let themselves be pierced by the pain of others. It is the mourning of the one who feels the other as “flesh of his flesh”, who is not afraid to approach until he touches his wound and feels compassion till he experiences that the distance is erased. It is the “mourn with those who mourn” (Rm 12:15). Those who cry thus will feel the consolation of God.

For Jesus, holiness is to know how to mourn with others.

d) *“Happy are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied”*

What we call human “justice” is often tinged with corruption, with particular interests imposed on the generals. Jesus teaches us, however, that the final word in matters of justice is the justice of God.

Those who hunger and thirst for justice, discern the will of God, identify with it and activate it especially with the helpless. They obey those words of the prophet Isaiah:

“Seek justice, help the oppressed, protect rights of the orphan, and defend the widow” (Is 1:17).

For Jesus, to seek justice with hunger and thirst, that is holiness.

e) *“Happy are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy”*

We are all sinners and constitute “an army of pardoned” by divine compassion. When we do not, we hear the reproach:

“Should not you also have compassion on your partner, as I had compassion on you?” (Mt 18:33).

The golden rule of Jesus is:

“treat others the way you would like them to treat you” (Mt 7:12);

“the measure with which you measure you will be measured” (Lk6:38).

Those who donate and forgive become a small reflection of the perfect God, who is, the Merciful (Mt 5:48; Lk 6:36-38). Mercy makes us happy and leads us to forgive “seventy times seven” (Mt 18:22).

This beatitude must be completed with (Mt 25: 31-46), where Jesus blesses the merciful in a very special way and offers the great criterion by which we will be judged: “Because I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you hosted me, I was naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in jail and you came to see me” (25:35-36).

For Jesus, look and act with mercy, that is holiness.

f) *“Happy are the pure in heart, for they will see God”.*

A contaminated heart is a source of evils: murders, robbery, false testimonies, and other things (Mt 15:19). Jesus knows “what is within” (Jn 2:25).

Only the heart that loves God and neighbor is pure and can see God. It is true that “now we see as in a mirror, dimly” (1Co 13:12); but Jesus promises that those of pure heart “will see God.” This bliss refers to those who have a heart simple, pure and blameless.

The heart needs to be taken care of (Pr 4:23), so that nothing stained by falsehood is inoculated in it. A loving heart closes the door to everything that threatens its love. God looks at the heart (Is 16:7), speaks to the heart (Ps 2:16), wants to write his Law in it (Jer 31:33) and when the heart hardens, he wants to give us a new heart (Ez 36:26). For Jesus, holiness is to keep the heart clean of everything that stains love.

*g) "Happy are those who work for peace, because they will be called children of God"*

There are many internal and external wars and conflicts, global, local and community confrontations; there are gossips and destructive criticism that do not build peace. In contrast, there are people who sow peace everywhere. Jesus wanted his disciples to bring peace to their homes (Lk 10:5) and to "seek what favors peace" (Rom 14:19).

Peace must be a peace without exclusions: that includes difficult, different, complicated people, people who require our care, or who have been beaten by life.

The peaceful person not only solves conflicts, but generates transformation. Being an artisan of peace is an art that requires serenity, creativity, sensitivity and dexterity. To those who work for peace, Jesus makes a fantastic promise: "They will be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9). Sow peace around us that is holiness.

*h) "Happy are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven"*

The disciples of Jesus experience persecution because we question the society, that annoys those who have perverse plans (political, economic, media, cultural, etc.) and renounce a comfortable life because we know that "who wants to save his life will lose it" (Mt 16:25).

Those who follow Jesus do not pretend, in any way, to be filled with enemies because of their intransigence, negativity or fundamentalism. The apostles of Jesus enjoyed the sympathy "of all the people" (2:47; cf 4:21,33; 5:13); but some authorities harassed and persecuted them (compare 4:1-3; 5:17-18).

Today we also suffer persecutions: bloody as many contemporary martyrs, or bloodless through slander and falsehood or ridicule that make us pass for ridiculous beings. But who suffers for justice and endures suffering or persecutions for the Gospel is in a process of maturation and sanctification. Being persecuted for the cause of Jesus is — according to his promise — a source of happiness and inclusion in the Kingdom (Mt 5:11).

For Jesus to accept the Gospel path every day, even if it brings problems, that is holiness.

### **3. The Spirit of the Beatitudes in Consecrated Life**

The consecrated life enters into the process of sanctification when it is allowed to penetrate by the spirit of the beatitudes. And for that, it would be enough to listen

— according to the method of Pope Francis — what answer Jesus gives to those who ask him for holiness. He says:

- To be poor in heart, that is holiness.
- To act with humility and meekness, that is holiness.
- To know how to mourn with others, that is holiness.
- To seek justice with hunger and thirst, that is holiness.
- To see and act with mercy, that is holiness.
- To keep the heart clean of everything that tarnishes love; that is holiness.
- To sow peace around us, that is holiness.
- To accept daily the path of the Gospel, even if it brings us problems, that is holiness.

All this is consecrated life when it provides reasons for our being as consecrated persons. The Lord made it clear to us that holiness cannot be understood or lived apart from these demands of his.

Today we must regain that message and Pope Francis expresses it in several suggestions, applicable to the consecrated life and any of its forms.

When I find a person sleeping in the open on a cold night, I can feel that this bulge is an unforeseen event that interrupts me, an idle delinquent is a hindrance in my path, an annoying sting to my conscience, a problem that must be solved by politicians, and maybe even a litter that dirties the public space. Or I can react from faith and charity, and recognize in him a human being with same dignity as myself, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother redeemed by Jesus Christ. That's being Christians! Or can holiness be understood apart from this living recognition of the dignity of every human being (*GE 98*)?

#### **IV. THE FIVE VIRTUES OF CONSECRATED LIFE**

We are recovering the language of “virtues”, including the state of laity. The apostolic exhortation evokes five virtues that show the dynamism of holiness and that come up against five serious defects of our time:

- 1) Patience-Meekness: against anxiety-nervousness and violence;
- 2) Happiness and sense of humor: against negativity;
- 3) Audacity and fervor: against sadness and unpleasantness;
- 4) In community: against individualism;
- 5) In constant prayer: against false forms of spirituality.

## **1. Patience and Meekness: against Anxiety, Nervousness and Violence**

Patience and meekness are two virtues that are found in every person who is moved by grace, has a center and inner firmness; in the person who is not affected by the acceleration, the anxiety — sometimes aggressive and fickle and the violence that invades social life; in the person who endures, support the setbacks and the swings of life, the aggressions of others, their infidelities and defects; in those who do not waste energy lamenting the errors of others and are able to silence the defects of their brothers; in the person who avoids the verbal violence that devastates and mistreats, because he does not think himself worthy to be rough with others, but he considers them as superior to himself (Phil 2:3).

Such inner strength comes from a fundamental conviction: “If God is with us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31). Such trust in God leads to endure everything, to expect everything. He who is patient and meek does not allow himself to be overcome by evil, nor does he return “evil for evil to anyone” (Rom 12:17), nor does he take justice for himself (v.19). Whoever behaves this way banishes from his soul the “bitterness, anger, anger and insults and all evil” (Eph 4:31).

Such patience and meekness are not achieved without inner struggle, vigilance before the aggressive and egocentric inclination that inhabits us. The new forms of verbal violence through the spaces of digital exchange also threaten us the consecrated ones and can lead us to defamation, slander, and revenge, causing us to sin against the eighth commandment.

Coupled with patience and meekness is humility of heart. It is the humble who is freed from self-centeredness, endure humiliations and not only the extraordinary ones, but also the ordinary ones like Jesus who “suffered for us, leaving us an example to follow in his footsteps” (1Pet 2:21).

## **2. Joy and Sense of Humor: against Negativity**

The apostolic exhortation emphatically proclaims that “to be a Christian is joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). The messianic time of Jesus — Mebasser (prophet of the good news) was presided over by joy. Mary rejoices (Lk 1:27), Jesus “was filled with joy in the Holy Spirit” (Lk 10:21) and in his wake, “all the people were happy” (Lk 13:17). His resurrection brought great joy (cf. 8:8) and thus his promises were fulfilled.

The Christian virtue of joy consists of “an inner security, a hopeful serenity that provides a spiritual satisfaction incomprehensible to worldly parameters”. Another

point is the consumerist and individualistic joy, which satisfies the occasional and temporary pleasure, but does not infuse joy. Bad humor is not a sign of holiness; yes, it is the good humor and a positive vision of the reality.

### **3. Audacity and Fervor: against Sadness and Unpleasantness**

There is a Greek term *parresia*, which can be translated by boldness, courage, thrust, witness without fear, and that expresses the seal that the Holy Spirit imprinted on the Apostles to launch them to authentically announce Jesus Christ. *Parresia* leads us today to boast of the Gospel that we announce, to trust unshakably in the faithful witness, that gives us the assurance that nothing “can separate us from the love of God” (Rom 8:39). With this energy which is the thrust of the Holy Spirit in us we feel free, available for God and for others. Comfort, unpleasantness-*acedia* and worldliness make us seek assurances and deprive us of *parresia*; But when we feel compelled by the love of Jesus (2Cor 5:14), we recover that energy which makes us say with St. Paul “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!” (1Cor 9:16). Audacity and apostolic courage constitute the mission.

God pushes and moves us to go beyond the known, to the peripheries and borders; towards a humanity more wounded and searching for the meaning of life. There is God. God wants us “on the way out”: he stretches us from our drowsiness and launches us to dislodge us. This is already happening with so many priests, consecrated, laity: saints who surprise, reconstruct and invite us to get out of our mediocrity.

### **4. In Community: against Individualism**

Holiness is communion and therefore is closely linked with the community. “Sanctification is a community path.” In isolation, we will hardly overcome our concupiscence and the wiles of the Evil One. This is reflected in many communities — Christian, religious, family — saints of the past and present.

In the community — and also in the meetings between friends and brothers — the mystical presence of the risen Lord is experienced. That is why the virtue of “communion” is so important. It makes us leave our ego-systems, and places us in the eco-system of the Spirit: “this happened in the holy community formed by Jesus, Mary and Joseph, where the beauty of the Trinitarian communion was reflected in a paradigmatic way”, or in the community of Jesus with his disciples.

The virtue of community leads us to pay attention to the details of daily life, which show mutual care. Sometimes “in the midst of these small details, we are

given consoling experiences of God”. And all this is part of the eco-system of sanctification. Jesus’ supplication was:

“May they all be one, as you, Father is in me and I am in you” (Jn 17:21).

## **5. In Constant Prayer: against False Forms of Spirituality**

Prayer and adoration connect us with the holiness of God, with its transcendence. The holy person needs to communicate with God permanently. That is the breath that **preserves her** from suffocating in closed immanence.

Who prays comes out of himself in praise and extends its limits in the contemplation of the Lord. The desire of God manifests itself in everyday life, but also in special moments of encounter “trying to be friends alone with whom we know who loves us” (St. Teresa of Jesus). Silence before the Mystery of God allows us to discern in the light of the Spirit, the path of holiness that Jesus — our Master — proposes to us who are his disciples and followers. Before the face of Christ Jesus, we re-find the path of our life and its reason for being and experience the transformation we need. In the authentic praying encounter, we do not escape: in the heart of God we find our world which he loves so much, and with which he maintains an unbreakable covenant with its lights and shadows.

And because our God is a bilateral covenant God, he wants to establish a dialogue with us free beings. That’s why the prayer of petition and our collaboration in your project make so much sense. Prayer as a dialogue with our God immerses us in the total reality of the world and history. There our God is committed. Prayer is transformed into **ad-prayer**, in silence full of admiration, in praise totally free and fascinated. Love stops, contemplates the mystery and enjoys it in silence. Prayer acquires its summit in the prayerful reading of the Word of God: when we let the Master to speak to us, to advise us, to direct our lives through his Spirit. From there, he takes us to the Eucharist, where his Word acquires maximum effectiveness. When we receive the body and blood of Jesus in communion, we renew our alliance with him and allow him to carry out more and more his transforming work.

## **V. THREEDYNAMISMS : COMBAT, SURVEILLANCE, DISCERNEMENT**

The last section of the apostolic exhortation is dedicated to the three dynamisms that accompany the process of sanctification: combat, vigilance and discernment.

### **1. Combat and Surveillance**

Although the Spirit of God is the great protagonist of the process of sanctification,

nevertheless, the spirits of evil are still present in our world and history. And we have to fight them. That is why Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer:

“Deliver us from the Evil One”;

It is a mysterious reality from which we ask the Abba to set us free so that his destructive power does not dominate us.

The Christian life is therefore, a permanent struggle.

It is not just a fight against our world and the worldly mentality, nor against our fragility or inclinations such as the so-called capital sins. It is also and above all the fight against the spirit of evil. And when we overcome him, Jesus overcomes him in us. He already told his disciples: “I was watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Lk10:18).

We will never understand in this earth the mystery of evil. It is a mysterious reality that we do not know how to explain, but that it is the origin of so much destructive force, as it harasses us. It is destructive, poisons us with hatred, sadness, envy, vices; and thus it destroys our lives, our families, our communities and our nations because “like a roaring lion, he prowls around looking for someone to devour” (1Pet 5:8).

The Word of God invites us to “face the snares of the devil” (Eph 6:11) and to stop “the inflamed arrows of the evil one” (Eph 6:16). In Covenant and communion with the Spirit of God, it is up to us to enter into constant struggle. We are not alone, but the Spirit counts on us and endows us with powerful weapons: faith that is expressed in prayer, meditation on the Word of God, celebration of the Eucharist, Eucharistic adoration, sacramental reconciliation, works of charity, community life and missionary commitment.

The spiritual struggle requires us to be “with the lamps lit (Lk 12:35) and “awake” (Mt 24:42; Mk 13:35); and not through “let us give ourselves to sleep” (1Thes 5:6); may we remain attentive: “Beware of all kinds of evil” (1Thess 5:22). The spiritual struggle makes us mature spiritually and grow in love.

The Christian triumph is always a cross, but a cross that at the same time is the flag of victory, which is carried with a combative tenderness before the onslaught of evil (GE 163).

It is very bad to fall asleep, to enter into the warmth of someone who is neither cold nor hot, because she gradually wears us down and corrupts, blinding us: “Satan himself disguises himself as an angel of light” (2Cor 11:14).

## 2. Discernment of the Spirit

Many wonder “how do we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit or if its origin is in the spirit of the world or from the spirit of the devil?” And the answer is: For the gift of discernment, which we must pray to the Holy Spirit. This gift is an energy that grows in us through prayer, reflection, reading and the good advice that Spirit provides.

Discernment is an energy that Spirit gives us and becomes little by little a style, a way of being and acting that leads us to discover; what God’s will is and conforms with his Kingdom, and what does not lead us anywhere. Discernment tells us that not everything is worth it. That good is discovered with the gift of wisdom.

Discernment faces the new in our own life: then we have to discover whether it is the new wine that comes from God or is a deceptive novelty of the spirit of the Evil One; but it also confronts the permanent, that which induces us not to change, to leave everything as it is, to opt for immobility or rigidity.

In discernment, the breath of the Spirit acts in us, which makes us free and calls us to examine ourselves and to discover its signs: “Prove everything; keep the good”(1Thes 5:21). Everything helps us to make a real discernment: but it is not confused only with the contributions of the human sciences (psychological, sociological, moral, or merely spiritual): discernment as grace introduces us into the heart of God, into the mystery of the Spirit of Jesus, which the Abba reveals to the simple and humble (Mt 11:25). Discernment is required at special times of crucial decision. Other times, it is required in the small, the irrelevant, the simple and the everyday. This discernment has to answer the traditional “examination of conscience”, which is done in dialogue with the Lord, who loves us and predisposes the means for us to carry out the Abba’s will.

Discernment asks us to silence ourselves and to enter into the great silence where, after the patient waiting, God speaks and reveals himself; it is necessary to be educated in the patience of God and in his times, which are never ours. Discernment introduces us into the eco-system of the Kingdom of God, of the Spirit and takes us out of our ego-systems. Therefore, discernment is collaborative. The perennial “today” of the Risen One and the Spirit that liberates us from rigidity and makes us “penetrate into the darkest folds of reality and consider all its nuances, so that the novelty of the Gospel may emerge with another light”.

The Spirit enters us not to mutilate or weaken but to fulfill. It makes us leave our self-preferentiality towards the mystery of God, which helps us to live the mission to which he has called us for the good of the brothers and sisters.

### **EPILOGUE: THE MOST SAINT AMONG THE SAINTS**

The saint among the saints, the most blessed was Mary, the mother of Jesus, the anointed and **fecundated** by the Spirit. She lived the Beatitudes of Jesus like no other;

He filled her with joy in the presence of God; she kept everything in her heart; she let herself be pierced by the sword of the Word.

She is the accomplice of the Spirit, through whom He teaches us the way of holiness and accompanies us; she does not accept that we fall and sometimes she carries us in her arms without judging us; she consoles us, liberates and sanctifies us, when we talk with her; as a mother, she does not need many words or explanations; it is enough to whisper over and over again: “God saves you, Mary”.

Where the consecrated life is, there is joy, there is holiness. Where the consecrated life is, there is holiness, there is joy. The consecrated life demands today, called, more than ever, to have the face of beatitudes.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> In the Apostolic Letter “Witnesses of Joy” on the awake, communion, periphery of the world and creativity-innovation. In the 1<sup>st</sup> place he hoped that the following phrase may come true: “where the religious are, there is joy” occasion of the year of Consecrated Life, Pope Francis presented five expectations that contain in five words: Joy, principal axis of his pontificate.



## NEW-GNOSTICISM – A SUBTLE ENEMY OF HOLINESS

---

Sr. Marykutty Joseph, SCSA

### INTRODUCTION

An intellect without God and without flesh is like a doctrine without mystery says Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Gaudate et Exultate*.

Gnosticism presumes a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience of a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings. One of the oldest heresies besetting the Church is Gnosticism. We can say “is” rather than “was” because the temptation to entirely spiritualize Christianity and demonize the material world never really goes away. We are seeing it in a new form today in the notion that the material world as it has been given to us by evolution is radically defective and we therefore need to transform it completely by human will.

This new Gnostic is misrooted to a great extent in modern science, rather than ancient spiritualism, and sees the human body itself — even the distinction of male and female to be something that is fundamentally flawed and in need of transformation by human technological power. To understand the new form of Gnosticism, we would better remind ourselves of the old.

### Traditional Understanding of Gnosticism

The name “Gnostics” (From Gnosis – knowledge) was given to a variety of sects in the early Church, each claiming a superior knowledge of Christianity and things Divine. The underlying principles of all Gnostic systems were “Dualism” or the theory which accepts two original principles, the one good, the other evil, and the

*Sr. Marykutty Joseph is from the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne. She spent most of her life in formation about 23 years. She gives classes and retreats to Religious and lay people. At present, she is in a poor mission living with simple people. She is also the vice provincial. She worked for the uplift of rag-pickers, transgender and prisoners. She can be contacted at marykutty363@gmail.com*

emanation theory or development of the two principles into a series of beings of their nature and kind. The Gnostics wanted to explain the existence of good and evil, the union of spiritual and material, the relations between Christianity, Judaism and paganism through pagan philosophy and the result was they fell into deep error.

The chief Gnostic ideas may be summed up as follows: The supreme God called Bythos i.e. depth because he dwells in the abyss, is infinitely separated from the material world. He is opposed by Hyle or matter, which is eternal, but a shapeless mass and apositively evilsubstance, the source of all evil. From Bythos emanated a series of divine spirits, or inferior deities called "Aeons" who compose and inhabit the "pleroma" i.e. kingdom of light. The maker and ruler of the material world is the Demiurge, who according to some sectis a good but limited being, a creature of the aeons, while the other Gnostics callhim an evil being opposed and hostile to Bythos. The Demiurge who in the Old Law revealed himself as Jehovah, also created man. Human beings are spiritual and of divine origin but their union with the material bodies is unnatural and the effect of compulsion. To redeem the enclosed spirits, the aeon Christ was sent by Bythos into the world, who according to the Egyptian Gnostics, united himself with the man Jesus. The Syrian branch of Gnostics, on the contrary, taught that Christ had no real human body, but only assumed.

Docetism was the common doctrine of nearly all the Gnostics. The redemption of man consists in his superior knowledge of God, and in making man conscious of his Divine origin. The suffering and death of Christ being only illusory, are of no avail in the work of redemption. The Gnostics distinguished three classes of men: The pneumatics or spirituals are the Gnostics, they are sure of their Salvation because they had this secret knowledge. Below these spirituals existed a great mass of uneducated Christians. They were forced to lead a life of severe asceticism. Then the third group was pagans who had no hope of Salvation.

For the Gnostics, good works are useless and that the material law is not binding. They rejected matrimony, the use of meat and wine and abstained from all legitimate pleasures.

### **Gnostic Explanation of Christianity**

The Gnostics denied original sin, incarnation and redemption. Christ was a good aeon who came down into the matter to teach the imprisoned particles of light the knowledge by which they might save themselves. His body was not real but apparent likewise his death and resurrection are also illusory. They denied the resurrection of the Body, rejected martyrdom for Christ and the Sacraments as useless, being only

material signs. The Gnostics came almost without exception from the race of the gentiles and their principal founders, natives either of Egypt or Syria where they had their own schools.

At its heart, Gnosticism had the hatred of the material world, in particular the human body. This hatred of the flesh led to the rejection of the possibility that the word could become flesh. They rejected sexuality both because it was so deeply bound up with sexual pleasure and because it led to more divine sparks becoming trapped in bodies.

The difficulty Christianity faced is that it was not battling complete falsehood, but a half truth, a fervent affirmation of Jesus divinity, but at the expense of his full humanity. That is the way of heresies. They are almost always human simplifications of the Divine mysteries. God reveals something that is above human understanding, and the heretic tries to re-formulate it to accord with human understanding. The incarnation — purely Spiritual God made flesh troubles our merely human minds. We get the idea of the material flesh, but that the two became united in one person that is above our human intellectual powers to grasp.

Faced with this mystery, we then have two choices. We may admit its truth, and humbly accept the incarnation as above the understanding of our human intellectual abilities, or we may deny what is beyond our grasp. The first is the way of orthodoxy, the second of heresy.

### **Neo-gnosticism**

The Neo-gnosticism did not spring forth all at once, but was gradually built upon over several centuries using four key elements: 1) The belief that the goal of science is not the discovery of truth itself but the relief of human suffering and the extension of human life; 2) The acceptance of an entirely materialist view of reality; 3) The Darwinian belief that thing in nature are randomly rather than Divinely contrived, and 4) An aggressive secularism rooted in atheism.

For the new Gnosticism, God doesn't exist and material reality is the only reality. The material universe (not God) is eternal and our world was created and is continually formed and reformed by the fickle ministrations of chance. The fickle "god" chance, therefore, becomes the equivalent of the ancient Gnostic demiurge deity who created the evil material world. The goal of science is to transform the faulty material by technological power. And the bad luck in nature especially in human nature can be overcome by the union of human intelligence and human technical power. The scientist himself becomes the savior who reveals scientific

knowledge “gnosis” that allows us to escape from the evils of the material world into a paradise of our own making.

Christianity is not anti-scientific or anti-technological. The development of pure science and technology are both essential aspects of our nature. The Christian differs from the modern gnostic not in having technology, but in the spirit of its use. The assumption of the new Gnostic is that he has been handed a work in progress, a work brought to an arbitrary and unsatisfying point by blind evolution and that his most important task is to take this defective material as his clay, and remold it according to the desired purpose. We can understand now the endless excitement about playing with our genome, driven by the notion that all the diseases and bad behavior are caused by our having been dealt a bad genetic hand. The natural distinction of male and female is one more natural limitation that the new Gnostics seeks to improve. The new Gnostic drive for equality assumes that the fundamental sexual distinction and its effects on the ordering of social and moral life are ultimately accidents of evolutionary history that can be repaired and superseded. The great energy put into “alternative reproduction technologies” is really at heart, directed to the elimination of the fundamental reason for the natural division between male and female. Obvious examples are abound. There definition of sexuality in terms of pleasure rather than procreation, the advocacy of contraception and abortion so that both men and women are equally removed from the connection between sexuality and child bearing, there definition of marriage as a union of a man and a woman to mean nearly any association, homosexual marriage, the notion that being a wife and mother is a kind of biological punishment or inferior vocation from which technology and politics must help women to escape rather than a noble vocation essential to our natural good, the notion that father and mother are not unique aspects of the natural family but can be replaced by the gender indifferent parent or caregiver.

### **Ecology and Gnosticism**

The Christian experience of creation described in the Papal document also acts as an antidote to old and new doctrines that spurn creation as an evil that needs to be overcome (even through ecological destruction).

All creation is good, wrote St. Paul in his first letter to Timothy echoing Genesis. Unlike many philosophical and religious doctrines, Biblical faith has always acknowledged that all objects and creatures starting with mankind were good when God created them. *Lauda to Si* continues to document the immense divide between the Christian experience and neo-Gnostic currents of thought that spurn matter and creation as evil that must be overcome.

The universe, Pope Francis stresses “did not merge as the result of arbitrary omnipotence, a show of force or desire for self – assertion. Creation is of the order of love. God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all the created things.”

In the late 1980s, Lieserl, the daughter of the famous genius Albert Einstein, donated 1,400 letters written by her father to the Hebrew University with orders not to publish their contents until two decades after his death. A part of one of those letters written by Einstein is given below:

*There is an extremely powerful force that, so far, science has not found a formal explanation to. It is a force that includes and governs all others, and is even behind any phenomenon operating in the universe and has not yet been identified by us.*

*In another letter he wrote: We physicists are trying to trace the lines drawn by that Old Man. This how he called God*

The major lines drawn in the universe by God are the “lines of love”. Throughout the Encyclical you can feel the amazement at the recognition of creation’s goodness. This irrevocably separates Christianity from Gnosis and all metaphysical paths that tend to consider matter and the limits of the condition of creation as a prison from which we must free ourselves through asceticism and self-enlightenment.

Contrary to those doctrines, Christianity recognizes that evil and corruption are not inscribed in the origins of creation through the malicious will of a capricious God. They entered the world through the historic sin of mankind. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.

## **Conclusion**

Gnosticism reduced Christianity into a set of ideas and doctrines, and emptied Christianity of its historical anchoring. Yoga, Buddhism and Gnosticism are all on the same line. It’s a process of self-divination. *Kundalini* is already in you. You need to lift it only by your own effort. God is not really needed. A Savior is not needed. What you need is only concentration. What you need is only your own effort. And Pope Francis says, “If Christianity is reduced to a series of messages, of ideas, then inevitably the mission of the Church is reduced to propaganda, marketing, that is to search for ways to spread those ideas and convince others to support them.”



## NEO-PELAGIANISM – A SUBTLE ENEMY OF HOLINESS

Sr. Sylvie Rodrigues

### INTRODUCTION

Is God's grace a mere comforting embrace for the sinner or is it an enabling and directing power, which drives Christians towards holy living? We believe that grace is an essential concept in Christianity and it is the core of the entire Bible.<sup>1</sup> It is the ultimate expression of God's immense love, expressed through his only Son, and intensely given to the sinners who repent and believe (cf. Mk 1:15; Mt 21:32; Jn 1:17; Acts 15:11; Rom 3:24).

Pope Francis in his recent Apostolic Exhortation on holiness, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, restates in many passages that "holiness comes from God" (cf. 1Pet 1:16; Heb 12:10; GE 9, 11). It is a fruit and gift of grace given in the life of the Church.<sup>2</sup> If there are saints in the Church, it means that Christ is alive, and his grace continues to work through them. The 'deceptive ideas' that flourish in the wake of Pelagianism and Gnosticism can cause impediment to accomplish the universal call to holiness (Mt 5:48; LG 40). These ancient Pelagian and Gnostic heresies could conceal or eradicate the necessity of the grace of Christ in our modern world.

Pope Francis draws our attention to be aware of the cultural changes and innovative ways of thinking which can be obstacles to salvation. He intends to demonstrate some aspects of Christian salvation that cause difficulties to comprehend in today's ethnicity. The exhortation elucidates how we need to reaffirm our union with Christ by being free from all the contemporary heresies that can hinder us to embrace holiness of God. Hence, this article begins with Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism and their controversies. Then, attempts are made to explicate in the light of Pope's

*Sr Sylvie Rodrigues is a member of the Congregation of Sisters of the Little Flower of Bethany, belongs to Western Province Dharwad and also one of the Councillors to the Provincial; presently residing at Bethany Convent Belgavi. She has M.Th in Biblical Theology from St. Peter's Pontifical seminary, Malleswaram. She is presently pursuing her doctoral studies at JDV, Pune. She can be contacted at sylvierbs@gmail.com*

apostolic exhortation how these heresies influence the Church and consecrated life. Finally, we shall see how we can be set free from the new forms of heresies that weigh us down from the path of holiness.

### **What is ‘Pelagianism’?**

Pelagius was a British monk, a very zealous preacher who was castrated for the sake of the Kingdom and given to rigorous asceticism. He was a resident of Rome between 390 AD and 400 AD. According to him, “every man is capable of attaining perfection by his own efforts. For this grace is a help, but, not necessary.”<sup>3</sup> Pelagius went to Carthage in 410 AD along with his companion Coelestius and educated them on morals and on the rigorous living of the Gospel. He was shocked to see immorality in their way of life. Coelestius, also was a prominent follower of Pelagius at the time.<sup>4</sup> Pelagius and Celestius were recondemned at two councils at Carthage in 411 AD and Milevis in 416 AD. Emperor Honorius issued an imperial decree enouncing the teachings of Pelagius and Celestius in the same year. Pelagius disappeared from history and is thought to have died in 420 AD.<sup>5</sup>

Pelagianism is the doctrine of Pelagius and his followers that denies the doctrines of original sin and predestination, and the defence of innate human goodness and free will. Pelagianism holds that each human being possesses the power to obey God and earn eternal salvation through his or her good works. St Augustine refuted the doctrine of Pelagius. Pope Zosimus by his epistle *Tractoria* appealed to all bishops to recognize the error of Pelagianism. Because of the continuation in the Church of these teachings, the final official condemnation of Pelagianism came in 431 AD at the Third General Council in Ephesus.<sup>6</sup> Pelagianism was officially rejected in the West and the East, lived on in less extreme forms, and has always represented a tendency in the theological thinking of the Church.

### **Pelagius’ Doctrine of Sin and Grace**

Pelagius was fundamentally a legalist and a moralist. He believed in the power of the human will. “If I ought, I can” is the catch word of Pelagius which summarizes his understanding of how God’s grace comes to humans by faith (cf. Eph 2:8; Rom 1:5). In other words, if God commands us to do something, we must be able to perform as God has commanded. This rejects the biblical doctrine of original sin. Pelagius taught about the principles of virtue and a holy life saying, “Self acquired virtue is the supreme good which is followed by reward, and it is the result of justification by the person’s own good works.”<sup>7</sup>

Pelagius denied original sin inherited from Adam. He affirmed that all human beings have the power not to sin (cf. Rom 5:12-21; Ps51). Adam’s sin merely set an ill example and many have been quick to follow. Pelagius’ position on originals in is stated as, “Adam is created mortal and would have died even if he had never sinned.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Pelagius and Augustine Controversy**

The Pelagian controversy turn sin to mighty antithesis of sin and grace. It embodies the whole cycle of doctrine respecting the ethical and religious relation of humans to God. The doctrine includes human freedom, primitive state, fall, regeneration and conversion, the eternal purpose of redemption, the nature and operation of the grace of God. Pelagius supported the personal moral reform stating that Christians ought to live a moral and upright life. Pelagius set his demand for moral renewal and perfection within a theological frame work. What are these controversial issues? They are discussed here below:

Pelagius declared that humanity is free to choose to act morally and is under an absolute moral obligation to do so. It was a matter of self-discipline and the exercise of will over the lower human nature. He thus insisted that since perfection is possible for humanity, it is obligatory. But Augustine disagrees by arguing that human nature is damaged and corrupted by sin. Human free will has been weakened and incapacitated — but not eliminated or destroyed — through sin. Therefore, to restore divine grace is essential.

For Pelagius humanity possesses total freedom of the will, and totally responsible for its own sins. According to Pelagius, any imperfection in humanity would reflect negatively upon the goodness of God. Augustine taught that human being still has free will (*liberium arbitrium*), but his will is in bondage to the sinful nature and he cannot do what is godly (cf. Rom 8:9; 1Cor 2; Jn 6:44).<sup>9</sup> For Augustine, humanity has no control over its sinfulness. It is something which contaminates life from birth, and dominates life thereafter. It is a state over which humans have no decisive control. Augustine explored this point by using three analogies to illuminate the nature of original sin: disease, power and guilt. It is ill, and needs to be healed. Until human nature has been renewed and transformed it is simply incapable of doing well.

Pelagius further argued that sin is basically a refusal on the part of human beings to do better. We have been commanded to act righteously, and that command implies the ability to act. For Pelagius, the human power of self-improvement is not

compromised. It is always possible for humans to discharge their obligations towards God and their neighbour. Failure to do so could not be excused on any grounds. Sin is to be understood as an act committed willfully against God. Augustine replied that it is through realizing one's inability to carry out God's will unaided that humanity discovered grace. He further interpreted that grace as the healing and renewing action of God. Pelagius agreed that human beings needed grace, but he argued that 'grace' is to be understood as God's generous provision of specific moral guidance. Instead of demanding that humanity is to be 'perfect,' in a very general and unspecific manner, God himself has made it clear the intended meaning of it. Although Pelagius views were well-received in Rome initially, the passing of time led to growing skepticism about his approach. Many began to draw the conclusion that Pelagius basically advocated a rather strict moral authoritarianism.<sup>10</sup>

The above controversy from Pelagius' analysis does not advocate any supplemental ingredient or external subsidy in order to do good and to attain salvation. The human will is the sole deciding factor upon which a person's actions rest on one's eternal destiny. Pelagius begins with 'natural human,' work for righteousness and holiness. Power is inhuman beings, the 'divided will' is not a problem. On the contrary, Augustine's view requires an irresistible gift of grace to be given by God to a person that will enable them to overcome sin and to do good. Augustine despairs of their oral sufficiency of human and derives new life and power from God's grace.

### **Semi-Pelagianism**

Semi-Pelagianism is defined as: "The name given to doctrines upheld in the fifth century by a group of theologians who, while not denying the necessity of grace for salvation, maintained that the first steps towards the Christian life were ordinarily taken by the human will and God's grace supervened later."<sup>11</sup> There were those with in the Orthodox Church who believed that Pelagianism is a heresy. But they did not agree fully with Augustinian Soteriology. These 'Semi-Pelagians' as they were called, rejected Augustine's doctrines of predestination and irresistible grace. They thought that these two doctrines denied human responsibility or free will. The Semi-Pelagians thought that if one held to Augustine's view of free will (being in bond age to sin), then this would undermine the monastic and missionary vision of the Church. To be as charitable as possible, the problem with Semi-Pelagianism is that they can accept some aspects of God's sovereignty and his purpose over his world. They cannot accept all aspects of God's sovereignty, especially as it pertains to human's salvation.

Augustine's view on grace is the opposite extreme to Pelagius. On his attempt, he minimized the role of human effort. The monks of the African monastery of

*Adrumentum* challenged him. They asked: if everything was to be attributed to grace, who has the responsibility for sin? Why do we strive for perfection? Augustine seemed to lead them to a kind of fatalism which would destroy the ascetical endeavour that is at the heart of monasticism. Augustine insisted on the necessity of cooperating with grace.<sup>12</sup>

In southern France Abbot John Cassian spoke against Augustine. According to him, God's salvific will is universal predestination which is not absolute. It is solely an act of predilection, but in accordance with God's knowledge of merits and sins of each. Grace is necessary for salvation; but once in the state of grace, there is no need of a special grace of perseverance. There is only one kind of grace for all.<sup>13</sup>

Cassian went wrong in holding that we could merit the grace of conversion by our prayers and good works. "In Cassian's view, his key difference with Augustine was over irresistible grace. For Augustine, man's will, though still capable of making choices, is morally unable to incline itself toward good. The will is not spiritually infirm, but spiritually dead. Only the effectual grace of God can liberate the sinner to believe."<sup>14</sup> Cassian and Semi-Pelagianism is, with respect to the sinner's initial step toward salvation, decidedly synergistic. God makes his grace available to the sinner, but the sinner must, with his infirm will, cooperate with this grace in order to have faith or to be regenerated.

As Philip Schaff states, "In opposition to Augustinianism and Pelagianism, Cassian taught that, the divine image and free do min man were not completely in bondage, but were only weakened by the fall. In other words, that man is sick, but not dead. He cannot help himself, however he can desire the help either to accept or refuse it. When it is offered, he must cooperate with the grace of God to attain his salvation."<sup>15</sup>

Semi-Pelagianism in response to Augustine's teaching on 'predestination and irresistible grace' affirmed that God chose based on a decision that he has foreseen in human. Also that person has the power to resist God's Spirit and grace when acted upon. Semi-Pelagianism makes them is take of interpreting based on a foreseen faith, as well as misunderstanding the primacy of regeneration before a person's faith (cf. Rom 8:28). The two theological issues are:

1. How dead is man when Paul says "dead in trespasses and sins" in Eph 2:1-3, and how unable is man to seek after God and his grace as a sinner as Paul teaches in Rom 3:9-23?

2. Does regeneration precede (as well as include the gift of) our faith as Paul teaches in Eph 2:4-10 and as Jesus says clearly in Jn 6:44, or does our faith precede our regeneration (as the Semi-Pelagians teach)?

Semi-Pelagianism teaches that grace is necessary to achieve righteousness. This grace is not imparted to the sinner unilaterally or sovereignty as it is maintained by reformed theology. Rather, the semi-Pelagian argues that the individual makes the initial step of faith before the saving grace is given. Thus, God imparts the grace of faith in conjunction with the sinner who seeks God. It seems a little mixing of grace and works doesn't worry the semi-Pelagian.

Salvation is not earned by our own effort or merit. It is free gift by God's grace in response to our faith (cf. Eph 2:8-9; Rom 5:1-2). Therefore, we need to put our trust in God and strive to cooperate with God's gifts in order to grow in holiness (cf. Prov 3:5-6; Jn 14:1; 1Peter 1:14-16; 1Tim 2:2-5). As baptized Christians, we are called to be the light and salt in this earth (Mt 5:13) and avoid all that hinders us towards the path of holiness (cf. Titus 3:2). Rather, allow the Spirit of God to lead us in the path of goodness and love (cf. Ps 143:10; Isa 63:7).

### **Contemporary Pelagianism: A Subtle Enemy of Holiness**

All the faithful of Christ are invited to strive towards holiness and perfection (*LG*). God desires that every Christian to be holy. Holiness means to be separated from worldliness and from sinful ways. It is important to desire God and imbibe his holiness into our lives so that our joy may be full (cf. Jn 10:10). Holiness is not achieved through our acts of righteousness, even though faith is justified by doing good deeds (cf. Rom 3:28; 10:4; Jas 2:24). Holiness does not make us less human because it is an encounter between weakness and the power of God's grace (*GE* 33). Then in this context, we shall reflect on the meaning of contemporary pelagianism and the subtle ways of holiness.

According to Pelagius, the nature of all human beings had not been hurt by Adam's sin, and therefore everyone is always able to choose good and avoid sin by simply exercising their own willpower. For Pelagius, Christ had come above all to give a good example, as someone to follow as a master of life and to learn how to grow one's moral virtues. This path could be completed just by counting on one's own strengths without him, and without the help of grace.

Those who are enslaved to the pelagian and semi-pelagian concept now began to attribute the power to the human will and personal effort. The human will took the place of mystery and grace. It overlooks that everything "depends not on human

will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy” (Rom9:16). Even though they speak warmly of God’s grace, “ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain rigidly faithful to a particular Catholic style” (GE49). Pelagians eventually trust just in their own particular powers and feel better than others. The absence of a genuine and devoted acknowledgment of our limits stops grace from working to recognize our solid and constrain circumstance.

On this point the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* is one among the many pronouncements with which the ecclesial magisterium has always repeated that in the real condition of being human, one cannot be holy nor can live a just life in the footsteps of Jesus without the intervention of his grace, without being embraced by his mysterious, yet very real presence. We must always come to terms with manifestations of the Pelagian attitude that infiltrates even the most ordinary practices of ecclesial life. The Apostolic Exhortation finds a Pelagian imprint in all those who “rely solely on their own strength,” and even when they want to show themselves faithful to a “certain Catholic style” (EG 94). In reality they are expressing the idea that everything depends on human effort even if channeled by ecclesial rules and structures (GE 58).

The Church has repeatedly taught that we are justified not by our own endeavours or particular deeds, but by the grace of the Lord, who always takes the initiative (GE 52). We cannot buy it with our works, but it is a ‘gift born of loving initiative’ (GE 54). Church always hold this great conviction firmly (GE54) and the Church has always taught that charity alone makes growth in the life of grace possible, for “if I do not have love, I am nothing” (1Cor 13:2).

Pope writes that the universal call to holiness is addressed precisely to those who acknowledge that in every step in the journey of life and faith there is always the need of grace. In this life human weaknesses are not healed completely once for all by grace (GE49). Grace precisely builds on nature but it does not make us superhuman all at once. Grace acts in history; ordinarily it takes hold of us and transforms us progressively (GE 50).

### **Neo-Pelagian Approach: A Subtle Enemy of Holiness**

Instead of knowledge, neo-pelagianism believes that anything can be achieved by willing it or by personal effort. The same power that the Gnostics attributed to the intellect, others now began to attribute to the human will, to personal effort. This is the case with the Pelagians and semi-pelagians. Now it is not intelligence that took

the place of mystery and grace but our human will. Everything depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy (cf. Rom 9:16) and he loved us first (cf. 1Jn 4:19). Neo-Pelagian approach distorts the Church discipline as well as brings down the religious spirit in the community.

In the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (Joy of the Gospel), the Pope discusses on the ‘spiritual worldliness,’ which is the self-absorbed Promethean neo-Pelagianism of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others. Pope says, “Instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts her or his energies in inspecting and verifying and so in neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others” (EG 94). There are Christians who like to take justification by their own efforts, the worship of the human will and their own abilities. The result will be self-centred and elitist complacency, bereft of true love. The following are some of the concrete behavioural patterns:

- an obsession with the law,
- an absorption with social and political advantages,
- scrupulous concern for the Church’s liturgy, doctrine and prestige,
- vanity about the ability to manage practical matters
- an excessive concern with programmes of self-help and personal fulfillment

Some Christians spend their time and energy on these things, rather than letting themselves to be led by the Spirit in the way of love, rather than being passionate in communicating the beauty and the joy of the Gospel and seeking out the lost among the immense crowds that thirst for Christ (GE 57).

Pope Francis criticizes rigidity, legalism, clericalism, elitism, conservatism, and traditionalism. He warns that contrary to the promptings of the Spirit, the life of the Church can become a museum piece or the possession of a select few. This can cause unconnected ways of thinking and acting: a fixation on the law, an intake with social and political points of interest, a meticulous worry for the Church’s liturgy, doctrine and prestige, a vanity about the ability to manage practical matters, and an excessive concern with programs of self-help and personal fulfillment, and thus in spite of the promptings of the Spirit, the life of the Church may end up fossilized ... or corrupt (GE 58).

Pope Francis also exhorts that we do well to continue reminding ourselves that there are hierarchy of virtues that offers us to look for what is fundamental in order

to avoid the presence of the above enemies of holiness in our lives. He continues, the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal 5:14). Jesus gave us the formula of seeing “the face of God reflected in so many other faces” (*GE* 60-61) and that should be one and only formula to reach holiness.

Neo-pelagianism is strong in a society like ours that’s convinced of the power of human creativity and human potential and the unlimited possibilities of an individual. Pope encourages everyone to reflect and discern before God whether these subtle enemies may be present in our lives (*GE* 62).

Similarly, religious life is oriented toward mission. ‘Not for ourselves alone,’ should be the saying. Consecrated life is apostolic in its very essence. It is not that persons in religious congregations do apostolic works or have individual ministries, but their whole way of life is for the sake of making visible and attractive their life for the love of God. An apostolic community intertwines the needs of the world into its spiritual consciousness and common prayer. An apostolic community shares its resources with the needy. An apostolic community responds to the needs and priorities of the larger congregation and also welcomes new members and introduces them to the way of life.<sup>16</sup> In short, an apostolic community is not turned in on itself, isolated and self-sufficient, but open to receive and share with others. Our vocation is not given for ourselves alone, but for the building up of God’s people, for the extension of Christ’s work in our time and space.

Mission is the key to understand the Church and everything happening within her, including consecrated life. Without the mission, as the basic and architectonic principle, everything could collapse. When the mission is the central and structuring principle, everything functions well and develops. When the mission does not fulfill this central and key function, other realities appear and try to take its place, such as, the spirituality, community life, new trends and personal activities understood as ‘work.’

We tend to be carried away by themes or topics of the moment, the snobbism of the moment. We get absorbed in problems of modernity, new age spirituality, globalization, sustainable development, and Marxism. But none of these are seriously confronted from the perspective of mission, but rather as an intellectual curiosity, without practical results or missionary implications. These reflections usually exert a superficial influence, because afterwards, we go in search of the next new trend, leaving behind the previous ones. The problems of society are contemplated from outside, not from within, in order to transform them (*EN* 14).

The lack of an authentic missionary spirit brings people to focus on their private interests. A way to mask our apostolic and missionary spirit, paradoxically, is to concentrate on work, 'my work.' There are workaholics; however, it is not a real passion for the mission. It is what was previously called the 'heresy of action.' What they are searching for is not service to others, but self-realization. All these have nothing to do with the realization of the Kingdom. Without the missionary perspective the service, formation and even theology have very narrow horizons. In the measure in which the vocational-missionary spirit does not work, the formation process goes crazy, becomes narcissistic, too sensitive to the individual horizon.

## Conclusion

As Catholics, one of the prime sins to be avoided is the sin of pride. But even a faithful Christian may sometimes take excessive pride in his own knowledge of the faith or his own self-control and will power. The Church is not an elite association of perfect people; it is more like a hospital where sick people come to receive God's mercy and find their way to God through Jesus Christ. If we keep this in mind, we can truly open our lives to receive the grace of the Lord, and we realize that all our knowledge, all our merit, would be of no avail, but for the fact that Jesus has saved us by dying for us on the Cross and giving himself to us in the Holy Eucharist.

However, in the face of these phenomena of ecclesial self-reflection, the Apostolic Exhortation does not begin cultural battles against neo-Pelagians. Pope prays that the Lord himself will set the Church free from these new forms of Pelagianism that weigh her down and block her progress along the path to holiness. The intention of the entire document is not to stigmatize the new form of Pelagianism, but only to invite everyone to seek every day the face of the saints scattered among the people of God, and to recognize them as a real and effective sign of the presence and mercy of Christ.

This theological reflection, deprived of the missionary perspective, will suffer from the same defect of Neo-Pelagianism. For that reason, the subjects considered essential in religious life, as consecration, vows, community, are the first ones to be understood as the gift and grace of God. As God calls us to holiness let us walk in trust. *Holiness* is motivated by the grace of *God's love for us* and requires the work of loving.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. RODGER K. BUFFORD, *Encountering Grace*, Newberg 2015, 1-25.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. MARYLIN T. KRAVATZ, *Partners in Wisdom and Grace: Catechesis and Religious Education in Dialogue*, New York 2010, 58.

- <sup>3</sup> THOMAS PALLIPPURATHUKUNNEL, *Church History: Christianity through the Centuries*, Delhi 2013, 110.
- <sup>4</sup> FRANK LESLIE CROSS – ELIZABETH A. LIVINGSTONE, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, New York 1997, 1257.
- <sup>5</sup> F. L. CROSS – E. A. LIVINGSTONE, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1257.
- <sup>6</sup> T. PALLIPPURATHUKUNNEL, *Church History: Christianity through the Centuries*, 112.
- <sup>7</sup> WILLISTON WALKER, *A History of Christian Church*, New York 1921, 185.
- <sup>8</sup> WILLISTON WALKER, *A History of Christian Church*, 186.
- <sup>9</sup> BENJAMIN MYERS, *Milton's Theology of Freedom*, New York 2006, 16.
- <sup>10</sup> ALISTER E. MCCRATH, *Christian History: An Introduction*, New York 2013, 63- 64.
- <sup>11</sup> F. LESLIE CROSS – E. A. LIVINGSTONE, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1481.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. T. PALLIPPURATHUKUNNEL, *Church History: Christianity through the Centuries*, 112.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. T. PALLIPPURATHUKUNNEL, *Church History: Christianity through the Centuries*, 113.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. R.C. SPROUL, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will*, Grand Rapids 1997, 72-73.
- <sup>15</sup> PHILIP SCHAFF, *History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity*, III, Grand Rapids 1982, 861.
- <sup>16</sup> DORIS GOTTEMOELLER, "Theology and Spirituality of Religious Life For the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Religious Formation Conference Spring* (2012) 1-16.



# HOLINESS AS LIVING THE BEATITUDES

**Xavier E. Manavath, CMF**

In spite of all our notions about holiness and assessment of the same in ourselves and in others, perhaps, it is better to begin with a humble position that God alone knows the holiness of a person and He alone can be the best judge on it. It is simply because holiness is all about the relationship that a person has in relation to God and the impact of this relationship in the entire relational world of the person. If so, the question arises: why do we discuss at all, on holiness in a seminar like this?<sup>1</sup>

I presume that the Holy Father Pope Francis while writing his Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exultate*, “Rejoice and Be Glad”, must have also asked the same question.<sup>2</sup> He knows and believes that “holiness is the most attractive face of the Church” and is seen “even outside the Catholic Church and in very different contexts.”<sup>3</sup> He recognizes holiness as a “heritage which speaks more powerfully than all the causes of division.”<sup>4</sup> However, to discover this attractive face with its beauty, it must be redeemed from the distorted notions that are often carried over from the past and also from the outdated or false assumptions on which it has been understood. Holy Father strongly felt that holiness needs to be re-visioned and presented in such a way that it is appealing, intelligible, meaningful to modern consciousness and accessible to ordinary people. Introducing the Exhortation, Holy Father says that the goal is “re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities.”<sup>5</sup> He speaks of the holiness needed for modern times and that too, in a very practical way.

## 1. CLEARING OFF THE MISCONCEPTIONS

The rediscovery of holiness, in the present day world is possible only if we clear off the misconceptions. Holiness is definitely not about a relationship between Jesus

*Xavier E. Manavath is a Claretian Missionary who has long experience of service in formation and on-going formation. He has a doctorate from Van Kaam's Institute of Formative Spirituality, Duquesne University, USA and has been the founding director of Sanyasa: Institute of Consecrated Life. After having served as Provincial Superior of the Claretians of Bangalore and the President of KRCC, he is currently the Director of Claret Nivas, the Renewal Centre of the Claretians of Bangalore Province. He is also the Vicar for Religious in the Archdiocese of Bangalore. He may be contacted at: xmanavath@gmail.com*

and me only, forgetting the inter-relationality involved. It is to be lived in the inter-relationality of our life. Holy Father writes:

For it has pleased God to make men and women holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather as a people who might acknowledge him in truth and serve him in holiness. In salvation history, the Lord saved one people. We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual. Rather, God draws us to himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in a human community. God wanted to enter into the life and history of a people.<sup>6</sup>

Holiness is not necessarily tied to its mummified models carried over from the past; having a glove around their heads; being always in prayer; and having their eyes always directed to the heaven. Sometimes, we think that holy people are above all flaws; they neither cry nor laugh and have no sense of humour or playfulness. They appear always serious. We really need to break out of such stereotyped models of holiness. Holiness will not take away our energy, vitality or joy.<sup>7</sup>

The type of devotion to the saints, practiced in the catholic tradition also has vitiated our images of holiness. They are often portrayed as examples of holiness that appear unattainable. We put the saints on the pedestals, above us and tell them: you are so high and we are down here and we cannot be like you. So we shall venerate you. Please do not come down to us because we cannot be like you.” They are often portrayed as people above all struggles of human lives and above all faults and failures. So, ordinary people cannot often relate to them as one of their own. Holy Father writes: “Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace.”<sup>8</sup>

Holiness is not something reserved only for Popes, Bishops, priests and religious. All are called to holiness. Ordinary followers of Christ, such as Martha and Mary are also called to holiness.

Holiness is often mistakenly seen as a state which you achieve and once you attain that you will not lose it; it is often seen as the end of a long journey. Holiness is increasing consonance that involves a process of gradual sounding together of the dispositions of our hearts together with the will of God. It involves a constant process of letting go and moving on.

There are many models and examples of holiness in the Church. However beautiful, they may be, they are not meant to be copied. Some of us are trying

hopelessly to imitate other models. We forget or are ignorant of the fact that there are different ways of living holiness unique to each person. A blind imitation can lead us away from our own unique path. We are called to be witnesses, but there are different ways of bearing witness.<sup>9</sup> Jesus says: “Let everyone hear what he or she hears (Mt 7:24)” “There are many mansions in my Father’s house” (Jn 14: 2). We need to discern our own path of holiness, bringing out the very best of ourselves.

What is essential to holiness is fidelity to what we have been called: Bishops, priests, religious, husband, wife, lay professionals, doctors, lawyers, journalists, artists, farmers, plumbers, electricians etc. The goal of holiness is to bring out the best in such a way that we radiate the love of God, nurture life all around ourselves. Holy Father writes:

Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by labouring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain.<sup>10</sup>

Holiness is not necessarily a call to become famous or popular; we need not try to do spectacular things. This is not the focus. In fact, there is holiness in more hiddenness as the leaven inside the flour, as the nutrients under the soil to make the seed sprout and grow. There can be holiness in just being the ordinary; there can also be holiness in finding a more perfect way of doing what we already are doing, doing the ordinary in an extraordinary way. It can be a call, as the Holy Father sees, “to live the present moment, filling it to the brim with love.”<sup>11</sup>

It is also very important to realize that holiness always exists with some degree of dissonance about which we may be conscious and sometime not aware at all. That is why there is always room to change and grow. We never come to perfection in everything. Gregory of Nyssa: “There is no stopping point in the race towards spiritual perfection.”<sup>12</sup> We need to grow constantly. At no point, we should say that now I have grown sufficiently; it is enough now; no more. That is why holy people do not count on their merits before the Lord. Little Teresa of Child Jesus prayed: “In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you empty handed, for I do not ask you Lord, to count my works. All our justices have stains in your sight.”<sup>13</sup> Journey of holiness always involves a continual process of formation, reformation and transformation.

Holiness is also not necessarily wholeness, even though wholeness can facilitate the growth of holiness. Holiness is also not necessarily experiential wholeness. A person may feel experientially broken and still be holy. Holiness is also not necessarily psychological wholeness even though psychological wholeness can facilitate growing in holiness. That is why we may still find mistakes and failures in saints. “Not everything a saint says is completely faithful to the Gospel; not everything he or she does is always authentic and perfect.” What we need to contemplate is the “the totality of their life, their entire journey of growth in holiness, the reflection of Jesus Christ that emerges when we grasp their overall meaning as a person.”<sup>14</sup> We must see how they kept on moving forward even in the midst of their mistakes and failures and proved pleasing to the Lord.

## **2. SEARCHING FOR AN AUTHENTIC FACE OF HOLINESS**

Clearing off the misconceptions, let us now search for the authentic face of holiness. The wider community of the Church and of the world searches for people who are the authentic and credible faces of the living Christ of the Gospel. It longs to see those whose hearts are free from the trappings of pleasure, property and power, the three classic idols through which the evil seduces us. It loves to see men and women of God as those who come across to others, as free, transparent, joyous and passionate people.

The recent scandals that rocked the Church involving both, her shepherds and the flock, including those who are called to live the Gospel in all its radicality, are stark reminders of a quite serious and an urgent interior reform, needed for the Church of our times. Power whether spiritual or temporal corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

When the three classic idols—the idols of power, property and pleasure are rolled in to one and lash against the rank and files of the Church, we certainly need to pause, kneel down, take a serious look and discern standing in the horizon of God who calls: “I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless” (Gen 17:1). It does not matter whether these scandals erupt in Syrian, Latin or Malakara churches and the persons involved; it is the One Church to whom we all belong, that suffers.

As Christian leaders at various levels and promoters of the Reign of God, we can no longer contain ourselves in a private domain; all our actions, relationships including our appearances have a sign value and have ramifications even beyond ourselves. It is all the more today because of the all-pervading and sometimes unjust scrutiny of the media.

But, for the moment, leave aside the exaggeration, the falsification and the gross misrepresentation of facts, spread by some of those in the media, the anti-Christian and anti-ecclesial forces that colluded with them, and the muted, often delayed and inadequate responses of our ecclesial leaders. We may have many reasons to blame.

However, we should discern that it is a moment of purgation; we are passing through a dark night of the spirit in the language of John of the Cross. We are being hammered, but a hammering, permitted by the Spirit, to bring out what is best in the Church of Christ. “Christian triumph is always a cross, yet a cross which is, at the same time, a victorious banner, born with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil”<sup>15</sup>.

My concern is not to go in to analysis of what could be happening around us but just to alert you of the urgency of living holiness, “the most attractive face of the Church,” the holiness needed for our times, the preparations needed and the kind of conversion demanded of us.

### **3. HOLY FATHER GUIDES THE WAY FORWARD**

Pope Francis shows us the way in these moments of “hammering.” He highlights before us a fundamental truth that holiness calls for true fidelity to what we have been called and must be manifested in the inter-relationship of our life. He states that holiness can be lived “each in his or her own way” and thereby discover our own unique path of holiness that brings out the best of themselves.<sup>16</sup>In this search, Pope Francis asks us to be cautious of two temptations that can lead us astray:

The first, is the temptation to master the Mystery of God by clinging on to a monolithic vision of Christian reality. We must learn to be comfortable with plurality in the world of today. All kinds of fanaticism emerge when we cling to a one sided perception of reality. There by we may end up, holding on to one part of the truth or making that one part in to the whole of truth.

The second, equally dangerous, is that which what the Holy Father calls, “the worship of the human will” and of our own abilities.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately we trust in our own powers and feel superior to others or cling on to a particular version of catholic style.<sup>18</sup> It involves also a lack of acknowledgement of our own limitations and a certain ignorance of a need for progressive purification of our own faculties and abilities. It prevents grace from working effectively on our abilities and efforts.

Such an attitude, namely, “the worship of the human will,” will give rise to various forms of imbalances in our life. There could be an obsession with law, an absorption with social and political advantages, a kind of fanatic concern with

Church's liturgy, tradition, doctrine, rules, status, prestige, promotion of oneself and personal fulfillment. We then reduce the Gospel into an ideology and deprives it of its simplicity and the power to inspire, allure and open new horizons. This is the reason why Francis of Assisi did not want to have any rule for his movement except that of the Gospel. He did not want to subject the life of grace to certain human structures. Grace surpasses the powers of human intellect and will. Even as it builds on nature, it does not make us superhuman all at once.

Holy Father writes: "Grace acts in history; ordinarily, it takes hold of us and transforms us progressively. If we reject this historical and progressive reality, we can actually refuse and block grace, even as we extol it by our own words."<sup>19</sup> An imbalanced approach to life can stifle our passion for communicating the beauty and joy of the Gospel and prevent us from seeking out the lost among the vast crowds that long for Christ. Here again, it is good to be reminded of Little Teresa of Child Jesus who prayed: "In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you empty-handed, for I do not ask you Lord, to count my works. All our justices have stains in your sight."<sup>20</sup> Only on the basis of God's gift, freely accepted and humbly received, can we co-operate by our own efforts in our progressive transformation.

#### **4. MODEL OF HOLINES IN THE BEATITUDES**

Being cautious about the above temptations, we must search for a model of holiness. In this journey, we must learn to keep our gaze fixed on to the radiant face of the Lord who called us and walk in that light.

Holy Father tells us that there may be many theories and models of holiness around us. But we must listen primarily to the one that the Lord offers. Jesus explains with great simplicity, regarding what it means to be holy in his proclamation of the *beatitudes* (Mt 5:1-12; Lk 6:20-26). According to the Holy Father, beatitudes are "like a Christian's identity card."<sup>21</sup>

Involved in the beatitudes are the invitations to "go against the flow," to run counter to the way things are usually done in our world; it involves a "daring to be different" in the manner and style that the Lord presented himself in the world

Going through the beatitudes, we will know that these are not certainly meant for catechumens who are yet to know the Lord; these are not conditions for discipleship. Instead they are signs or manifestations in the lives of those who have fallen under the mystic of the Kingdom of God. That is why the Holy Father says: "Every saint is a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people."<sup>22</sup> Beatitudes will shine through us only if we allow the

Spirit of God to rest upon us as “tongues of fire” burning away our selfishness, complacency and pride as it happened on the day of Pentecost and later in the post paschal discipleship of the apostles who are sent out into the world.

#### **4.1 Being “Poor in Spirit”**

We become “poor in spirit” as we learn to accept our innate poverty as human beings. We realize that we are creatures with a mystery at the heart, as we carry a treasure in the fragility of the earthen vessels, meaning the fragility of our human condition (2Cor 4:7). Everything human is transitory. Our black hair will pass into grey, hair itself will pass; our youthfulness, the fairness of our skin, our positions, and our relationships, including the best, also will pass. As everything passes, we realize that there is nothing to hold on as a permanent reality that will bring us security. We need to own up and accept the poverty inherent in our human condition. A patient and loving acceptance of this poverty is needed not only for holy but also for healthy life. Some concrete expressions of this poverty are: poverty of the common place, poverty of misery and neediness, poverty of uniqueness and superiority, poverty of our provisional nature as human beings, poverty of our finiteness, poverty of genuine human encounter, and poverty of death.<sup>23</sup>

Precisely this realization will make us radically open to God, just like the tax collectors, prostitutes and the sinners of the Gospel, in whose hearts the “Lord can enter with his perennial newness”<sup>24</sup> Holy are we when we are poor in spirit.

#### **4.2 Being Meek and Humble**

We become humble when we gain the courage to walk in the truth of who we really are without exaltation, falsification or covering up. Humility is freedom from the clutches of pride and vanity—from the need to dominate, lord over and impose. We shed the air of superiority and become competent in dealing with faults and failures of others with patience and compassion. We become more ruffled so as to bear the brokenness of others with whom we live and less and less scandalized by their faults. It is because, as we read in the letter to the Hebrews, “for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb 4:15).

Meekness also gives us the capacity to defend our faith and convictions without doing violence to others and to the world around us. It grants us the ability to care for and nurture life in all its forms. It is meekness that gifts us with simplicity with

regard to the positions we hold, the knowledge that we have, the questions that we raise and the answers we find, shedding all forms of arrogance, domination and elitism. Those who walk into the orbit of our lives would feel comfortable in being with us and in relating to us. We will come across to others as more and more approachable. Blessed are we when we are meek and humble!

### **4.3 Having the Spirit of Endurance**

The world around us generally wants to avoid sufferings that are often built into the very fabric of our life. We grow in your commitment to God, only when our endurance is tested through moments of purgation. Hence Jesus said. “Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.<sup>14</sup> But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Mt 7:13).

Generally, the world and we all want an easy way out, disregarding, covering up or hiding the painful situations. We usually are not prepared to go through the “narrow door,” that Jesus wants us to go through. The cross can never be absent in our lives. Coming in touch with our sufferings, we have access to the depth of life and the meanings hidden in it, provided we process them and live through them creatively and positively and not in a way that we become prisoners to them or get overwhelmed by them.

Tested through sufferings, we are able to share in the sufferings of others, understanding their anguish and bringing relief. We will not be afraid to draw near, even to touch their wounds in the Pauline sense of “weeping with those who weep” (Rom 12:15). Holy are we when we gain the spirit of endurance!

### **4.4 Being Hungry and Thirsty for Righteousness**

Before we demand justice for ourselves or for others, make sure that we are fair and just in our own decisions, interactions and pursuits. It is quite possible that what we demand as justice for us, as Theresa of Child Jesus cautions us, “may have stains in the sight of God.” Sometimes, our efforts towards justice become clogged down by corruption, partisan attitudes, class wars, violence and hatred. Other times we get misguided by people with vested interests of their own.

It is also true that the justice that Jesus offers may differ from the justice that the world offers. Love can go beyond the exigencies of justice. The Roman Centurion had a slave in his household, but he loved his servant just like his own son, so much so that he was prepared to go and request Jesus for help even though Jesus belonged to those Jews, subjugated by the Romans.

Our hunger for justice must be primarily directed to those who are most vulnerable and those who live on the human peripheries. “Seek justice, correct the oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Is 1:17). Holy are we when we are filled with hunger and thirst for righteousness.

#### **4.5 Being Merciful**

Mercy, which guides your pastoral approach should involve two dimensions: the first involves giving, helping and serving others and the second, understanding, compassion and forgiveness.

To serve the second dimension, we may have to undo the legalism and the self-righteous attitudes that had gripped our catholic tradition for centuries. Gospel holiness has nothing to do with moral imperialism or the elimination of all defects. It is almost entirely about receiving God’s free gift of compassion, mercy, and forgiveness and mediating them appropriately to those who need.

We know God by participation in God, not by trying to please God from afar.<sup>25</sup> Rather than being judgmental, we need to be merciful even when we are “confronted by situations that make moral judgements less assured and decision difficult.”<sup>26</sup> While declaring the Year of Mercy on December 08, 2015, Holy Father writes: “How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst!”<sup>27</sup>

The walls which for too long had made the Church a kind of fortress is to be torn down and the Gospel has to be proclaimed in a new way. We need to mirror a Church that mediates Jesus who expresses concretely the face of the mercy of God. Through our pastoral action, we must make the tenderness of God present to the believers. Holy Father writes: “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love.”<sup>28</sup> The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy. Blessed are we when we become the mediators of mercy and compassion!

#### **4.6 Being Pure in Heart**

Heart, in the spiritual traditions, is considered to be constellation of relatively

lasting or enduring convictions that move us to interact with the world in consistent and coherent ways.<sup>29</sup> The truth of a person lies in the dispositions of their hearts, apart from all the appearances.

In the first Book of Samuel, we read: “Man sees the appearances but the Lord looks into the heart” (1Sam 16:7). The desires and the deepest decisions that determine our actions, emerge from the heart (Mt 15:18). Therefore, we must constantly strive that the convictions or dispositions of our hearts remain simple, pure and undefiled so that nothing might harm, weaken or endanger that love, the only commandment God has given us.

That is why we must “guard our hearts with all vigilance” (Pro 4:23) and see that they are not stained by any falsehood, distortions or illusions. Ordinarily, as St. Paul says, “we see in a mirror dimly” (1Cor 13:12). To the extent that truth and love prevail in the dispositions of our hearts, to that extent, we will be able to see God “face to face.” No wonder Jesus promises that those who are pure in heart “will see God.” So let us keep our hearts free from all that tarnishes and prevents love. Certainly there can be no love without works of love, but God expects a commitment that comes straight from the heart. For “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have no love, I gain nothing” (1Cor 13:3). What proceeds from the heart defiles a person (Mt 15:8). From the heart come the intentions, desires and decisions that determine our actions.

#### **4.7 Being Peace-Makers**

In a world, torn by divisive politics, conflict, polarization, violence and spreading of lies through gossip and channel discourses, there exists a greater need for peace-makers. To be peace-makers demands that we be free from carrying tales, gossiping, exaggerations, embellishments, distortions and falsification on our part that contribute to conflicts and misunderstanding.

The disciples of Jesus wherever they were sent, were told to say “peace be to this house.” (Lk 10:5). Even in such situations, when we question what ought to be done, let us “pursue what makes for peace (Rom 14:19). It is not easy to mediate this evangelical peace which, according to the Holy Father, “excludes no one but embraces even those who are a bit odd, troublesome or difficult, demanding, different, beaten down by life or simply uninterested.”<sup>30</sup> Speaking of the mediation of evangelical peace, he writes:

It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. The sower, when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact. He or she

finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear. The disciple is ready to put his or her whole life on the line, even to accepting martyrdom, in bearing witness to Jesus Christ, yet the goal is not to make enemies but to see God's word accepted and its capacity for liberation and renewal revealed.<sup>31</sup>

Peace-building is not just about creating "consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority" or a project "by a few for the few."<sup>32</sup> Nor is it an attempt to escape or disregard conflict. It is certainly hard work. Because it calls for great openness of mind and heart, freedom from trappings of demonizing some and divinizing others, the capacity to see strengths and weaknesses, lights and shadows of those involved on both sides of the spectrum and a painstaking commitment to "pursue what makes for peace" (Rom 14:19).

According to the Holy Father, to be holy means that we learn how to face conflict, resolve it and integrate it into a process of growth in a new direction for all involved. Peace-building, according to him, is a "craft that demands serenity, creativity, sensitivity and skill."<sup>33</sup> Blessed are we when we become builders of peace.

#### **4.8 Being Persecuted For Righteousness' Sake**

The path ahead of us for holiness is the one that Jesus himself walked. That path calls us to go against the flow, challenging the society by the way we live and propose. Let us not sink into a thoughtless mediocrity. Let us rediscover for the people, the lost face of Christ, sometimes, even in our churches.<sup>34</sup>

In living the Gospel, let us not think that we simply go along with the dominant conventional traditions and customs. We need a counter-cultural sensitivity, drawn from a faithful contemplation of the Gospel which makes us critique the thirst for power, glamour, self-projection and worldly interests that often stand in our way. A society becomes alienated when its forms of social organization, production and consumption are not compatible with the demands of the Gospel.<sup>35</sup>

When we take our commitment to God seriously and to others, we may become a nuisance; we will have to endure suffering for the sake of the Gospel and at times, persecution (Acts 5:41; Phil 1:29; Col 1:24; 1Pet 2:20 4:14-16; Rev 2:10). At the same time, we must also know that there are certain kind of persecutions that we invite by our mistreatment of others, our vanity, negativity, bitterness, bigotry and intolerance.

In a society where politics, mass communications and economic, cultural and even religious institutions become so entangled so as to become obstacles to authentic

human and, social development, we must stand out and dare to be different in the manner and style of Christ. Such a positioning, according to Pope Francis, could be “viewed negatively, regarded with suspicion, and met with ridicule.”<sup>36</sup> We must never forget that in the daily path of the Gospel, we will have to endure suffering of all sorts. Jesus calls us blessed when people utter all kinds of evil against us falsely on his account (Mt 5:11). Hence for holiness, we must be prepared to be persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

As we are confronted with ridicule, criticism or unjust scrutiny, realize that there is an opportunity to renew our commitment to live this holiness manifested in the path of the beatitudes. We need to be ready to respond to those moments with the *luminous mysticism* of the Gospel.<sup>37</sup> That is the option that we must choose, rather than criticizing of those who oppose us. Our life is the testing ground of our faith. Holiness is the concrete expression of our faith manifested in the quality of our lives. No wonder that Holy Father states: “Christianity is meant, above all, to be put into practice. It can also be an object of study and reflection, but only to help us better live the Gospel in our daily lives.”<sup>38</sup>

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, we can probably arrive at a simple definition of holiness. It consists on the *transcendent or Chris-like quality of our responsiveness to life*. It calls for a continual choosing—a choosing to incarnate Jesus in our decisions and attitudes. It is the response to the call of God to rise above our addictions, clinging attachments, strong aversions or detachments. Anxiety, pride and the desire to impress others will not lead to holiness. We must choose to love in the way Christ loved; this means choosing to be generous and forgiving, overcoming our impulsive reactivity, going that “extra mile, moving out of cliques and closed groups, resisting exclusion and being more inclusive. It means to gain patient acceptance of reality so as to gain the space and the freedom to respond to it creatively, positively and appreciatively; it means to shed elitism and a better than others mentality, rising above partiality and transcending one-sidedness. Loving silence while fleeing interaction with others and wanting peace and quiet while disdaining service, calling them as “distractions,” are not signs of holiness. In a holy life, everything can be accepted and integrated and such experiences become a part of our path to holiness.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the presentation that the author made at a One Day Seminar on Holiness at Claretian Seminary, Malleswaram, Bangalore on January 27, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exultate, Rejoice and Be Glad* (Rome: 19 March, 2018). Hereafter abbreviated as GE.

<sup>3</sup> GE 9

<sup>4</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Homily for the Ecumenical Commemoration of Witnesses to the Faith in the Twentieth Century* (7 May, 2000)

<sup>5</sup> GE 2

<sup>6</sup> GE 6

<sup>7</sup> GE 32

<sup>8</sup> GE 34

<sup>9</sup> GE 11

<sup>10</sup> GE 14

<sup>11</sup> GE 17

<sup>12</sup> GREGORY OF NYSSA, *Life of Moses, Series in Classics of Spirituality*, New York 2006, 50

<sup>13</sup> THERESA OF THE CHILD JESUS, “Act of Offering to Merciful Love” (Prayers, 6)

<sup>14</sup> GE 22

<sup>15</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation (Rome: November 24, 2013), 85.

<sup>16</sup> GE 11

<sup>17</sup> GE 57

<sup>18</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation (Rome: November 24, 2013), 94: AAS 105 (2013), 1059

<sup>19</sup> GE 50

<sup>20</sup> THERESA OF THE CHILD JESUS, “Act of Offering to Merciful Love” (Prayers, 6)

<sup>21</sup> GE 63

<sup>22</sup> GE 21

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed explanation of the meanings involved in these concepts, please read JOHANNAS BAPTIST METZ, *Poverty of Spirit*, New York 1968.

<sup>24</sup> GE 68

<sup>25</sup> JOSEPH F. SCHMIDT, “Perfection: A Problem and a Solution,” “Perfection,” *Oneing*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (CAC: 2016), 29. RICHARD ROHR, “The Trap of Perfectionism: Two Needed Vulnerabilities,” “Perfection,” *Oneing*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (CAC: 2016), 73.

<sup>26</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Rome 1992.

<sup>27</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Misericordiae Vultus*, (Rome, April 11, 2015) 5.

<sup>28</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Misericordia Vultus*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> ADIAN VAN KAAM, *Formation of the Human Heart*, New York 1986.

<sup>30</sup> GE, 89

<sup>31</sup> GE 24

<sup>32</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), 218 & 239

<sup>33</sup> GE, 89.

<sup>34</sup> I am reminded of an example. An young girl from a family that I have known, came to me and said that she did not want a Church wedding; she said that it was too expensive and that her both parents are retired and she did not want her parents to spend all that money, needed. I simply told her that all that the Church wants is the mature and responsible consent, free from all impediments, of the couples involved and two witnesses. The rest are all human and social conventions, not mandated by the Church. It is our responsibility to clarify for ordinary Christians the mind of Christ, in the midst of so many human and social conventions.

<sup>35</sup> JOHN PAULL II, *Centesimus Annus*, Encyclical Letter (1 May 1991), 41c.

<sup>36</sup> GE 91

<sup>37</sup> GE 100

<sup>38</sup> GE 109

## SIGNS OF HOLINESS IN TODAY'S WORLD

Sr. Ruby, OSA

### INTRODUCTION

*Gaudete et Exsultate*, is Pope Francis' third apostolic exhortation. It is subtitled "On the call to holiness in the contemporary world." The 44-page exhortation explains that holiness is the mission of every Christian, and gives practical advice for living out the call to holiness in ordinary, daily life, encouraging the practice of the Beatitudes and performing works of mercy. Pope Francis affirms joyfully that holiness is "the most attractive face of the Church" (GE 9). At its core, holiness consists in the union with Christ: union with the crucified and risen Lord (GE 20). Hence it is needless to stress the importance of holiness in the life of the Consecrated persons. It is letting the Blessed Trinity —Triune God who dwells within us — work in us through divine grace, which purifies, elevates, and enlightens us (GE 24).

Holiness is "life in the Spirit". Holiness is "The Life of Christ" the way, the truth and the life. In the first place, we learn from the life of Jesus that holiness is Spirit-filled life! In the second place we learn from the life of Jesus that holiness is Spirit-led life. In the third place we learn from the life of Jesus that holiness is Spirit-Lived.

Holiness means to imitate Jesus, the virtuous one. All virtues are connected among themselves, and centered on love and work through faithful love (GE 60). The agent of holiness is the Holy Spirit, who leads us in the way of love (GE 57). Beside the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, the human and moral virtues are also signs and means of holiness, especially mercy, humility, prayer, joy, patience, perseverance, meekness, justice, courage or boldness, fervor and peace. This call celebrates the anonymous spiritual warriors, the saint next door, and their invisible acts of love, kindness and mercy that may never be validated or honored in our worldly view.

*Sr. A.S. Ruby O.S.M. belongs to the Congregation of Mother of Sorrows Servants of Mary. She served the Congregation as Formator, teacher, Spiritual Director and Retreat Preacher. She also served as programme producer and broadcaster in Radio Veritas Asia Manila. She also served the Congregation as Provincial for two terms. At Present, she is the Director and resource person of Jegamatha DhyanaIllum, Trichy. She can be contacted at asrubyosm@yahoo.co.in*

It calls us to live and pursue a sanctified life while acknowledging the impossibility of achieving in the smallest act of holiness without God's grace. This exhortation contains five chapters. I present the momentous fourth chapter which is titled 'Signs of Holiness in Today's World'. Before delving into my subject, I would like to give a brief overview of the term "holy".

### **1.1 Holiness**

The Second Vatican Council aimed at a radical renewal of all aspects of Christian life — radical in the original meaning of the word, that is, to get to the roots, to return to the source. As Christian, Christ is the radical center of our lives, and we are called to follow him in holiness. The word "holy" indicates in one sense the "beyond-ness" and "above-ness" of God. In that sense, holiness is a profound mystery utterly beyond our understanding. When we look at it in another sense, this holy God dwells among us. This belief gives us hope and invites us to become holy like God, in a human fashion, embodying his goodness, reliability, truthfulness, love, purity, and justice in our lives. God wants all of us to be holy in every aspect of our thinking, our speaking, our doing, our working and our loving. "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). And, "Imitate the one who called you. As he is holy, so you, too, be holy in all your conduct since Scripture says: You shall be holy, for I am holy (1Pet 1:15-16). Hence, "holiness" is a fundamental requirement for every human being to enter the kingdom of God.

### **1.2 "Holiness" from the Perspective of Pope Francis**

To give some idea of what to expect, it might be helpful to see what the Holy Father has said in the past about holiness. In November 2014, he dedicated his general audience catechesis to the theme, and underlined the "universal vocation to being saints," a vision which was recovered at the Second Vatican Council, he said. He stressed that sanctity is "not something we can procure for ourselves" and that all are "called to be saints" in their daily lives. "The Lord asks only this: that we be in communion with Him, and be at the service of our brothers and sisters," he said.

- a. In his Letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul states, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her," (5:25-26). Sanctity is understood, then, not as a prerogative of the few: sanctity is a gift offered to all, no one excluded, by which the distinctive character of every Christian is constituted.
- b. This is it: every state of life can lead to holiness, always! The path to sainthood has been opened. Don't be discouraged to pursue this path. It is God alone

who gives us the grace. The Lord asks only this: that we be in communion with Him, and be at the service of our brothers and sisters.

- c. This is the path to holiness. When the Lord invites us to become saints, he doesn't call us to something heavy or sad. Quite the contrary! It's an invitation to share in his joy, to live and to offer with joy every moment of our life, by making it become at the same time a gift of love for the people around us. Every step towards sainthood makes us better people, free from selfishness and self-centeredness, and opens us to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

This is what St Peter asks of us: "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God. Whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1Peter 4:10-11).

This is the invitation to holiness! Let us accept it with joy, and let us support one another, for the path to sainthood is not taken alone, each one for herself or himself, but is travelled together, in that one body that is the Church, loved and made holy by the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us go forward with courage on this path to holiness.

### 1.3 Key Elements Regarding the Signs of Holiness in Today's World

"At its core," Francis says, "holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of His life," and letting ourselves be transformed into Christ who is love incarnate. In other words, "we are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness (to God's love) in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves" and such holiness grows even in small gestures.

Beyond the personal examples of holiness in daily life in the first chapter, Pope Francis notes in the third chapter the criterion on what it means to be holy, pointing to the Beatitudes, and to the final judgment of the nations in Matthew's Gospel (5:3-12; 25:31-46). Within this framework, the Holy Father highlights in chapter four, the signs or attitudes that are necessary for loving God and neighbour. These include: trust in God who loves and sustains us, which gives us the grace and strength for perseverance, and patience in avoiding evil and doing good, Christian joy and good humour, boldness and fervour of the Holy Spirit, community, and caring for one another, and "habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 110 *et seq.*, 147). The Pope speaks about "certain aspects of the call to holiness that I hope will prove especially meaningful", in the form of "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."

So, just what are Pope Francis' five marks of holiness in today's world? Here's a look at each of the signs and what they mean for those of us striving towards heaven. Let us explore these factors one by one.

### ***1.3.1 Perseverance, Patience, and Meekness***

In chapter four, Francis presents a "few signs" or "spiritual attitudes" that are "necessary" for a saintly lifestyle. It begins with endurance, patience, and meekness.

"The first of these great signs perseverance which results from a solid grounding in the God who loves and sustains us", (*GE* 112) Pope Francis writes. "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. "When God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31).

"One of the greatest temptations of religious and priests is to complain constantly about the shortcoming of others" said Pope Francis (Apostolic visit to Egypt in April 2017). "The saints," recalls Francis, "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" (*GE* 116). "It is not good when we look down on others, like heartless judges, lording it over them and always trying to teach them lessons. That, it is a subtle form of violence" (*GE* 117).

We need to recognize and combat our aggressive and selfish inclinations. Let us not forget St Paul's exhortation to the Romans not to repay evil for evil; neither to overcome by the evil around us, but to overcome all evil with good (cf. Rom 12:17). We need to be patient both with ourselves and with those around us. Patience is the state of endurance under difficult circumstances, which can mean persevering in the face of delay or provocation without becoming annoyed or upset; especially when faced with longer-term difficulties. When we overlook the evil done to us we are not being weak, rather we are being heroic strength.<sup>1</sup>Besides, it is how Jesus responded to the hatred and insults of those who had him crucified!

"Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph 4:26). This requires great inner strength which is the work of grace within us. Grace will prevent us from becoming carried away by all the violence and evil that are part and parcel of life in the world around us. Grace will strengthen us to be meek and humble of heart so that we do not waste our energy in complaining about what is

wrong around us. St Paul exhorts us to “Have no anxiety about anything [...] resort to prayer and supplication [...] let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7).

In these days abuse of digital communication is as bad as that of people in the world of politics and cinema. Christians “can be caught up in networks of verbal violence through the Internet and the various forms of digital communication.” Even in Catholic media, limits can be overstepped, defamation and slander can become commonplace. “It is striking that at times, in claiming to uphold the other commandments; they completely ignore the eighth, which forbids bearing false witness or lying, and ruthlessly vilify others.” Hence, the Pope offers us practical support and advice for our journey how to get there, as well as warning us of the dangers facing us on our journey and dangers in false forms of holiness, violence in our thoughts, and our daily lives, digital communications, consumerism, as well as the very real and present danger posed by Satan himself. The Pope asks us to discern any traces of these blocks to holiness in our lives and warns us not to let our guard down: our path to holiness is a spiritual battle. Patience helps us avoid making impulsive decisions.

Being on the path to holiness means enduring humiliations. They do not have to be extreme forms like those endured by martyrs. “Humility” explains Pope Francis “can only take root in the heart through humiliations. Without them, there is no humility or holiness” (*GE* 118). Humility is the quality of being humble which enables one to put others in the front. It is simply free of egoism and giving oneself at the service of others.

He is not speaking “about stark situations of martyrdom, but about the daily humiliations of those who keep silent to save their families, who prefer to praise others rather than boast about themselves, or who choose the less welcome tasks, at times even choosing to bear an injustice so as to offer it to the Lord” (*GE* 119). The obvious lesson: perseverance, patience, and also humility are elusive grace even when we think they are what we seek. We must persist, no matter what, if we wish to enter into the peace that is lying underneath the pain that self-discovery sometimes initially brings with it.

### ***1.3.2 Joy and a Sense of Humour***

Every person is created to be happy now in this world and to be enormously happy forever in the next. This is God's gift and wish for every human being. “The

saints are joyful and full of good humour” (*GE* 122) even in the face of trials and tribulations. They radiate a positive and hopeful spirit, even in hard times. “Ill humour is no sign of holiness” (*GE* 126), neither is going about sad or dispirited. In fact, sadness can be a sign of ingratitude for God’s many gifts. An authentic Christian life must be joyful. The Christian life is “joy in the Holy Spirit,” (Rom 14:17), for “the necessary result of the love of charity is joy.” Today’s individualistic and consumerist culture does not dispense real joy; “consumerism only bloats the heart” (*GE* 128) with pride. Having received the beautiful gift of God’s word, we embrace it “in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit” (1Thess 1:6). “Rejoice in the Lord always; I say it again, rejoice!” (Phil 4:4). We do not experience joy when we look for it directly, it comes to us as a byproduct, the more selfless we are, and the greater joy we have in our life.<sup>2</sup>

We can get so caught up in ourselves that we are unable to recognize God’s gifts (*GE* 126). We take each day for granted most of the times and do not see the blessings that carry in disguise even in times of tribulations. We would rather imitate St. Paul’s words, “I have learned to be content with what I have” (Phil 4:11). Joy, in communion with others, that shares and is shared in giving and receiving, increases our capacity for more joy since it makes us capable of rejoicing in the goodness of others. “Rejoice with those who rejoice” (Rom 12:15). Sharing our gifts and talents, time and our knowledge to others gives us serenity and joy which comes from our inner self.<sup>3</sup> Often we see people those who are content with life and who is a giver always enjoy life and always be joyful. From day to day experience if I could experience the loving presence of God, it’s great evidence that I’m a joyful person.

After the resurrection of Jesus, wherever the disciples went, there was “much joy” (Acts 8:8). Jesus assures us: “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy [...]. I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (Jn 16:20, 22). Hard times may come, when the cross casts its shadow, yet nothing can destroy the supernatural joy that always endures, even as a flicker of light, born of our personal certainty. Joy brings deep security, serene hope, and a spiritual fulfillment that the world cannot understand or appreciate. The Pope is encouraging and challenging us on the path to holiness because holiness is necessary for our happiness. In order to bring out the best of who we are, and to embrace the unique plan of God for us and for the world, we need to strive after holiness. The Pope writes this exhortation as one who walks and prays beside us so that our desire for God finds expression in our daily lives and enables us to share happiness that the world cannot take from us.

### 1.3.3 *Boldness and Passion*

Holiness is also boldness and passion, “an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world” (*GE* 129). How often we are tempted to keep close to the shore! Yet the Lord calls us to put out into the deep and let down our nets for a catch (Lk 5:4). He bids us spend our lives in his service. Clinging to him, we are inspired to put all our charisms (gifts) at the service of others. “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1Cor 9:16). “God is eternal newness. He impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond” (*GE* 135). He takes us to where humanity is most wounded, where men and women, continue to seek an answer to the question of life’s meaning. God is fearless! He is always greater than our plans and schemes. And He knows we are weak but He does not leave us to be friendless. He says, “Do not be afraid. I am with you always, to the end of the world” (Mt 28:20).

Holiness is full of a bold desire to evangelize and make a difference in today’s world.<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis urges his readers to look to the ultimate example of passionate living for Jesus Christ. Let us follow in the footsteps of the Apostles and the missionaries who boldly proclaimed Christ who is been crucified even at the cost of their own lives.

Pope Francis summarizes these elements in these words: “Boldness, enthusiasm, the freedom to speak out, apostolic fervour, all these are included in the word *parrthesía*” (*GE* 129). Boldness is about living out who we are as child of God. Without timidity we must be open to reach out to people who are suffering and lonely. Pope Francis says, “Look at Jesus. His deep compassion reached out to others. It did not make him hesitant, timid or self-conscious, as often happens with us. Quite the opposite. His compassion made him go out actively to preach and to send others on a mission of healing and liberation” (*GE* 131). Therefore, we must overcome the temptation “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” (*GE* 134). Boldness means bravery: not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition, acting on convictions even if unpopular, includes physical bravery but is not limited to it.<sup>5</sup> Let us acknowledge our weakness, but allow Jesus to lay hold of it and send us too on mission. We are weak, yet we hold a treasure that can enlarge us and make those who receive it better and happier. Boldness and apostolic courage are essential parts of mission.

When talking about passion and boldness Pope Francis warns us not to fall in self-sufficiency. “Complacency is seductive; it tells us that there is no point in trying to change things [...] because this is the way things have always been [...]. By force of habit we no longer stand up to evil” (*GE* 137). We are challenged to be creative to rethink our usual way of doing things; to open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, to newness.

“God is eternal newness,” Francis writes. “He impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar to the fringes and beyond [...]. We will find him there; indeed, he is already there” (*GE* 135).

When mission is merely an idolatrous action that places man at the center, it is doomed to fail. But when mission is an overflow of delight in the supreme worth of God, then even in the face of trials, persecution, or martyrdom, we can join the ranks of men like Paul when he says, “But none of these things moves me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” In the letter to the Romans, Paul also declares, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” It is only when God is the chief vision of the missionary that trials, persecutions, and martyrdom make sense.

The Pope recalls the example of many 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” (*GE* 138).

Passionate missionary Spirit drives us to respond to God’s call courageously. It recreates newness to see the world in new a perspective and serve people lovingly as Christ Jesus did.

### ***1.3.4 In Community***

Through this exhortation, Pope Francis re-proposes the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities. He doesn’t propose a single path to holiness or one vision of the saintly life. We aren’t called to be cookie-cutter versions of the saints of old but to be our full self. He challenges us to recognize that the call to holiness is deeply personal, but it is not

individual. We are called together to be holy, and the holiness of one touches that of another. “We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual.”

One of the reasons for community life is the satisfaction of certain basic needs that all persons have. Let us look at four of these needs: identity, intimacy, generativity, and achievement in relation to community life.<sup>6</sup> The power of the Holy Spirit acts on the bread and wine, making them into the body and blood of Christ —the life giving source of ecclesial community.

We’re not meant to live apart from others, separated from those we love. In isolation, it can be difficult to combat temptations, and the devil can sneak his way into our hearts. The holy antidote to the loneliness the world is experiencing today is community. Pope Francis is clear that our personal call to holiness entails action. It is achieved in the context of the saints in heaven, our communities around us, and the wider world of our suffering brothers and sisters.

A person seeking holiness cannot ignore injustice, and should seek social change, recognizing that holiness cannot be understood apart from the recognition of the dignity of each human being. Jesus stood for justice. He befriended the poor, the marginalized and the voiceless. He was scathing in his condemnation of those Scribes and Pharisees who oppressed the poor (Mt 23:4). Our whole life must be seen as a mission and a way of building God’s Kingdom, the ultimate criterion on which our life will be judged is what we have done for others. “For I was hungry and you gave me food” (Mt 25:35-40).

A religious community with a commission, even a noble task as its primary purpose risks allowing both community and mission to become purified. The apostolate is inseparable from the path of transforming union. Man is made in the image and likeness of the Triune God, finds his meaning in a unity of distinct persons, related in self-giving. We can value ourselves only if another will value us. Our success is not counted by the works and offices, gains and profits but by the genuine and quality of our relationships and to stand by truth and justice. To get this, we need to keep in touch with the divine. It reflects and tells us from time to time; what am I? What do I share with my community? What do I give to the people in terms of feedback and support?<sup>7</sup>

“Contrary to the growing consumerist individualism that tends to isolate us in a quest for personal well-being apart from others, our path to holiness can only make us identify all the more with Jesus’ prayer ‘that all may be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you,’” Pope Francis writes (*GE* 146). Growth in holiness is a

journey in community, side by side with others. We learn from others. We receive support and affirmation from others, and we support others along the Way. Some are religious communities. Some are married couples and their families. Living and working alongside others is surely a means of developing and practicing holiness, surely a path of spiritual growth.

St. John of the Cross told his followers, “You are living with others in order to be fashioned and tried.” We all need a little pruning, some more than others. Contrary to the growing consumerist individualism that tends to isolate us in a quest for well-being apart from others, our path to holiness can only make us identify all the more with Jesus’ prayer “that all may be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you” (Jn 17:21). Living holiness in community is made up of small, everyday things.

Mountains are made of many grains of sand, and lifetimes are made of many little moments (Proverbs 15:17). Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred. Maintaining loving relationships and enjoying the basic things of life are more important than wealth and success.

It was also true in the time of Jesus. Here are just a few examples of Jesus paying attention to small details of the needs of those around him.

The little detail that wine was running out at a party.

The little detail that one sheep was missing.

The little detail of noticing the widow who offered her two small coins.

The little detail of having spare oil for the lamps, should the bridegroom delay.

The little detail of asking the disciples how many loaves of bread they had.

The little detail of having a fire burning and a fish cooking as he waited for the disciples at day break (*GE* 144).

### ***1.3.5 In Constant Prayer***

In this section, Pope Francis urges us to be people of constant prayer, echoing St. Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, “We urge you, brothers [...] support the weak, be patient with all [...] always seek what is good for each other and for all. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing” (1Thess 5:17). Pope Francis’ last sign of holiness in today’s world is a state of constant prayer. “Though it may seem obvious, we should remember that holiness consists in a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration,” he writes. The saints are distinguished by a spirit of prayer and a need for communion with God. Hence only from the union with

Jesus Christ, we get strength to live together as community and work together in the vineyard. Without the inward journey, our ministry lacks integrity.<sup>8</sup>

Pope Francis quotes St. John of the Cross, “Try to be continuous in prayer, whether you eat, drink, talk with others, or do anything, always go to God and attach your heart to him.” Being in this frame of mind, we will always form our worldview, and our choices with the mind of God. In the end, our desire for God will find its expression in our daily lives.

Pope Francis then notes, “For this to happen, however, some moments spent alone with God are also necessary” (*GE* 149). 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.

By striving to become holy, we become at the same time more human. To be holy is to be truly human. Holiness is found in everyday people and everyday things.<sup>9</sup> This is what Pope Francis repeats throughout the document, that our striving for holiness must be grounded in prayer and discernment so that our lives are transformed in the light of mercy and grace. He is clear that holiness can only be achieved in the power of the Holy Spirit and through union with Jesus — sometimes born in heartache and sorrow but always listening to the Lord. The Pope strongly urges us to spend time with Jesus in silence, contemplating Him in order to restore our humanity and enable us to reach out to others.

Finally, though it may seem obvious, “we should remember that holiness consists in a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration” (*GE* 147). The Pope asks: “Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord’s presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze” (*GE* 151)? But this prayerful silence is not “a form of escape and rejection of the world around us” (*GE* 152). Silence could also express deep inner sentiments. Such a silence is far from empty. It could be a way of listening (What does he say to me?), a way of agreeing (yes father, let it be) without conditions or explanations, a way of realizing our poverty and dependence.<sup>10</sup>

So our Pope challenges us with a few questions:

- Are there moments when you place yourself quietly in the Lord’s presence, when you calmly spend time with him, when you bask in his gaze?
- Do you let his fire inflame your heart? Unless you let him warm you more and more with his love and tenderness, you will not catch fire.

Prayer of supplication is an expression of a heart that trusts in God and realizes that it can do nothing of itself. Prayer of petition often calms our hearts and helps us persevere in hope. In the Eucharist, the written word attains its greatest efficacy, for there the living Word is truly present, precisely because Christ is truly alive and present in the Eucharist.<sup>11</sup> The celebration and adoration of the Eucharist together constitute the source of prayer and its apex.

And Francis also recalls how difficult it is “to fight against concupiscence, the snares and temptations of the devil and the selfishness of the world” (*GE* 140). It is, therefore, important that “the common life, whether in the family, the parish, the religious community or any other, is made up of small everyday things” (*GE* 143). That was also true of the life that Jesus shared with his disciples and with ordinary people. Let us not forget that Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details. The little details are just as important as the big ones.

The Pope concludes, “Need to see the entirety of your life as a mission,” and explained that this is accomplished by listening to God in prayer, and asking the Holy Spirit for guidance in each moment and decision. “A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness,” he stated, explaining that this path has its “fullest meaning in Christ, and can only be understood through him.”

Using the words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Francis wrote that “holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full.” As a result, the measure of our holiness stems not from our own achievement, but “from the stature that Christ achieves in us.”

*Gaudete et Exsultate* is different in tone and emphasis from preceding documents. However, in this great document, the Holy Father has summed up the five signs of love for God and neighbor as perseverance, patience, meekness; joy and a sense of humour; boldness and passion in the service of one’s neighbor; community and prayer. Now it is up to us to make these same signs of our love for God and neighbor visible in the way we live.

However, I have concluded this paper with a few insights of mine that for which we are called for particularly in the Indian context, a call to holiness for the church in India today, challenges to holiness in the life of clergy, religious and laity in India. We can do this wonderfully when we understand the persecution and acquisition of Jesus in today’s context.

#### **1.4 Call to Holiness for the Indian Church Today.**

In a country like India which is filled with corruption, poverty, castism injustice, sexual harassment, violence and addiction, the Pope helps us to see the face of God. While cautioning us against the two heresies namely Gnosticism and Pelagianism, in their subtle forms, modern-day seekers of God are led towards self-deception. In their attempt to seek holiness, their knowledge blocks them to seek God's Grace and Mercy.

This attitude can even enter the Church in India and prevent genuine work for the marginalized. Sometimes the Church refuses to recognise the face of Jesus in the poor, the sick and the addicted (cf. Mt 25:31- 46), turning organizations doing such work into "parasites" on church premises! Within the practice of the Beatitudes, the challenge of Holiness is when those who seek pathways to holiness are humiliated and have to persevere in the likeness of Jesus. The Church in India needs to move away from old fossilized forms of Christianity and awaken to a more lively and joy-filled spirituality in the likeness of the Master Jesus.

#### **1.5 Challenges to Holiness for the Consecrated Persons of Today**

According to Pope Francis, where there is no life, no joy, no meaning, no peace, and finally no celebration, there is no God and no humanity. He asserts this in many ways and on many occasions. What about forming relationships? As Consecrated persons, we are indeed called to be in relationship both with God and with other human beings. Only here we understand the deep importance of journeying together, the meaning of true happiness, and the joy of union with the Lord. Actually these are the factors which motivate our consecrated community life and these are the means that lead us towards the path of holiness. Especially Journeying together is indeed hard. Each person and the community as the whole need the transforming presence of Christ. To make the most of this wondrous journey and to smooth its progress together, we gather together. We support one another by our words, our prayers, and our presence and we grant one another the silence and solitude we all need. However there can be pain and discouragement, but also joy, peace, and love. There is no way to make it alone. Only by living together we can give witness to our mission.

Today we, the clergy and religious are facing numerous other challenges like shallowness of God experience, living in comfort zones, cultural alienation, consumerism, individualism, lack of fulfillment in the ministry, addiction to drugs, sex, mass media, power, money, authority, etc. However, personally I feel, our focus

must be on Jesus Christ, the one who called us is able to remove all the stumbling blocks, if only we have a real longing and thirst for marching towards holiness. Certainly we will be made use of an instrument for bringing the Reign of God on this earth.

### **1.6 Understanding the Persecutions and Accusation of Jesus and His Mission.**

The first question I would like to take up is whether Jesus's words about persecution are relevant in these days. Has modern society become so tolerant that talk of persecution is outdated? My answer is that these verses are very relevant and not at all outdated. Let me mention two reasons why this teaching on persecution is still relevant today. First, let's focus on why the persecutions come. This is important because not all persecuted people are blessed. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Mt 5:10). The second reason is persecuted or accusation, is to keep our eyes on Jesus and make his name known.

Persecution has existed since the dawn of Christianity and has persisted in various forms ever since. Stoning, burning at the stake, imprisonment, family estrangement, and the list goes on. History is stained with the blood of martyrs and is augmented by the testimony of those who've endured hardship on account of Christ. The Roman emperor Nero set Rome on fire, and when criticized for it, blamed Christians. Peter and Paul were martyred under his reign.

Evangelization in any areas of ministry is dangerous and unpredictable today. Violence and persecution is more than ever before. Religious freedom and freedom of speech in our country is outdated. We hear news everyday like laity and religious have been vehemently persecuted. Churches and Christian institutions are attacked and holy articles and statues are desecrated. Likewise, in the educational institutions today we face directly and indirectly lots of challenges and trials in the form of appointments and admissions. When we persevere in our commitment to serve we find the real joy as Jesus says those who have no root will fall away "when trouble or persecution comes because of the word" (cf. Mt 13:21). If believers are firmly rooted in Scripture, they have the weapons they need to ward off the enemy.

Persecution or accusation, our joy as Christians is to keep our eyes on Jesus and make his name known. To that end, the global church can support believers who are subtly or overtly harassed for their faith. When Paul was imprisoned, his friends took care of his needs instead of running in fear (cf. Acts 24:23). Opportunities to help persecuted brothers and sisters often present themselves. The global church can be diligent to meet those needs.

Instead of cursing our persecutors, the church can forgive them following St. Stephen's example in asking that the Lord forgive his persecutors (cf. Acts 7:59-60). Loving and praying for those who inflict pain is not an easy task, yet Jesus asks it of his followers (Mt 5:44).

Jesus wills for us to have our hearts primarily in heaven, our hopes primarily in heaven, and our longings primarily in heaven and our joy primarily in heaven. There is no other way that we can rejoice and be glad at the loss of our earthly joys. How shall we rejoice and be glad when these things are taken from us if we have not loved heaven more? "The more your faith is tested, the greater your reward."

## Conclusion

The signs of holiness in today's world list expressions of love for God and neighbor: perseverance, patience, and meekness; joy and a sense of humor; boldness and passion; involvement in community; and constant prayer. Francis insists on the need for holiness in all parts of our lives, including online: "Christians too can be caught up in networks of verbal violence through the internet and the various forms 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. The result is a dangerous dichotomy, since things can be said there that would be unacceptable in public discourse, and people look to compensate for their own discontent by lashing out at others. It is striking that at times, in claiming to uphold the other commandments, they completely ignore the eighth, which forbids bearing false witness or lying, and ruthlessly vilify others. Here we see how the unguarded tongue, set on fire by hell, sets all things ablaze" (*GE* 115).

Mary is the model of holiness, as she has been called forth to encourage and guide our hurting world, which she has done all throughout her earthly and heavenly life. In order to learn from and emulate her example, we must embrace a similar kind of holiness, simplicity and humility by committing ourselves to the betterment of the lives of others through responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds.

Through this exhortation Francis re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities. He doesn't propose a single path to holiness or one vision of the saintly life. We are called together to be holy, and the holiness of one touches that of another.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> R.J. WICKS, *Seeds of Sensitivity: Deepening Your Spiritual Life*, Mumbai 1995, 57.
- <sup>2</sup> R.A. PAI, *Alive and Free: Putting on the Mind and Heart of Christ*, Dindigul 2006, 125.
- <sup>3</sup> J. FANNAN, "The Joy of Consecrated Life: That Your Joy may be Complete," *Asian Journal of Vocation and Formation* 40/2 (2015) 6.
- <sup>4</sup> R. PERINO, *Call to Holiness: New Frontiers in Spirituality for Today's Religious*, Mumbai 2003, 123-124.
- <sup>5</sup> F. MASARENHAS, "Acquiring the Character-Strengths of Jesus," *Asian Journal of Vocation and Formation* 40/2 (2015) 25.
- <sup>6</sup> F. PODIMATTAM, *Consecrated Community Revisited*, Delhi 2007, 32-34.
- <sup>7</sup> D. PUDUSSERY, *Life Stripped in Splendour: Reflections on the Beauty and Blessedness of Consecrated Life*, Bangalore 2015, 61.
- <sup>8</sup> JERRY, *Keep Going...! Keep Growing..!*, Chennai 2014, 22.
- <sup>9</sup> R.C. MARTIN, *Called to Holiness*, Mumbai 2001, 49.
- <sup>10</sup> R.A. PAI, *Prayer is ...*, Dindigul 1998, 116.
- <sup>11</sup> F. MASCARENHAS– R.R. SILVANO, *Wake up the World! Biblical Reflections on Consecrated Life*, Bangalore 2014, 67.

# LIFE OF HOLINESS – A CONSTANT BATTLE (ARISE AND SHINE – YOU ARE THE LIGHT BEARER)

**Sr. Stella Baltazar, FMM**

## INTRODUCTION

Divine wisdom enters into Holy Souls and makes them shine in splendour like the sun since God is in their midst. “Reign righteousness you heavens, let the skies above pour down; let the earth open to receive it, that it may bear the fruit of salvation with righteousness in blossom at its side” (Is 45:8). This gift of God, made available to every being, is the source and origin of Holiness. When God becomes the center of life, the readiness to be broken for others like the master Jesus, becomes a reality. Character and integrity are key qualities to grow in this grace-filled life of holiness. In weakness, the power and the strength of God soars high. Holiness is dependence on the mercy and magnificence of God; gradually becomes radiant in the Divine and becomes transforming presence. In every religion men and women have experienced this divine manifestation since this experience transcends religions and enters into universal communion with all, a point of meeting with the divine and the human above all differences.

## The Battleground of Holiness

There is no holiness without the willingness to be broken like the body of Jesus Christ. Suffering is the fountain rock of building inner courage. This courage is the key to face the fears and dangers at all odds. God whispers in our conscience to be afraid of sin. It is a matter of being afraid of hypocrisy, and making a mockery of consecration through sacrilege, of lying and of lust, of stealing the money of the people, of seeking and establishing comfort and convenience. These are the real obstacles and sins that divert to grow in a life of grace and holiness. Yet God’s

*Sr. Stella Baltazar is a member of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. She holds Masters in Sociology and in Theology. She has been involved in the Empowerment of Women in India at the National level with 64 Dioceses as Women Development Officer with Caritas India. Worked with Caritas Switzerland as Consultant/Resource Person engaged in Projects for Community Development with special focus on Human Rights, anti-trafficking, domestic workers, Rag picking. Her expertise is in the field of animating groups for Social Transformation and Leadership. Presently, she is superior of the community and correspondent of Nazareth and Bethlehem Schools at Ooty in the Nilgiris. She can be contacted at stellafmm@gmail.com*

assurance of enabling and accompanying the soul to live one's convictions with courage to refuse evil and choose good is the treasure given to the human in earthen vessels.

In frustration and fear, in loneliness and isolation, in rejection and pain of sorrow, God is near. To hold on to God and earnestly believe God is there beside to uphold, comfort and strengthen the wearied soul. In confusion and frustration there is a ray of hope instilled by God, the still small voice whispering the Good news, "Be not afraid. I am with you." "He will transform this humbled body of ours anew, moulding it into the image of His glorified body, so effective is his power to make all things obey him" (Phil 3:21). The divine assurance to accompany the human in this process is the daily miracle of life. God suffices to heal make us whole.

The essence of any religion lies solely in the answer to the question: why do I exist, and what is my relationship to the infinite universe that surrounds me? The meaning of life is intertwined with reflecting divinity which God placed within the human. "Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths" (Is: 2:3). It is a time of restful silence at the feet of the Lord where intuition is infused into the soul.

Yahweh continuously called people to holiness. By the very nature of creation, Yahweh shared divinity with nature and humanity. Everything is the reflection of the creator. Divine goodness is inbuilt into creation. Therefore, holiness is in the very nature of the created reality. Everything in creation gives, gives and gives. Sun, moon and stars share light, the wind and river water and air, the vastness of space facilitates freedom and allows all types of movements — the birds, the planets, the aircraft, etc. and mother earth contains all richness, source of water and life, minerals, food, fruits, fire-warmth and allows the growth of the forests, animals and humans. This mysterious wonder of creation which gives without expectation of returns is the reflection of divine holiness, the very image of God.

### **What happens when the human resists?**

When people refuse to live their original nature and find alternatives they differ the gift of God and try to establish their very ego self a projection of selfishness. The deviant behavior is born in the mind. This is a purposeful way of alienation, moving away from the divine abundant Goodness. This condition leads to egoism which is a way of taking over God and placing self instead. Pride and prejudice, anger and jealousy, revenge and cruel violence erupts in the place of dignity, humility,

generosity and the experience of being rooted in God. Gradually the place of God is replaced and self plays god in one's life. Thus the loss of holiness is the tragedy of the saga of human existence.

However, God did not give us up utterly. God did not break the covenant He made. God's Son became one among us to bring us back from sin, slavery and alienation. Once and for all, he paid the ransom by shedding his very blood on the cross. Thus he opened the flood gates of divine mercy to bring healing, wellbeing and Holiness to humanity and the ecological community.

This divine interpolation stirs the heart of the person who is beckoned by divine impetus to respond. Grace alone is the anchor at this crucial moment to be held on. It enables the one to take a "U" turn and face the sun. It takes courage to leave one's shadow and follow the path of the divine master. This internal battle has to be won with determination and a constant vigilance not to fall back on old ways that deviate from the path of God. It is like the arrow that has left the bow in order to arrive at its desired destination. God's aliveness enables the human to muster courage, to launch into the newness where holiness beckons. "In God alone my spirit finds rest."

Holiness is wholeness embracing, the totality of one's being, doing and becoming. It is inner integration wherein all the faculties of self become attuned and aligned to the single purpose of life. Holiness is being earnest in the fulfillment of God's will with earnest care. It entails one's physical strength, psychological energy, social connectedness, civil responsibility and inward interior integration which binds all of these into a single pointed purpose, for the fulfillment of the will of God in one's life which is indeed the enrichment of others lives.

St. Ignatius of Loyola says: "A man who finds the path to virtue difficult yet sets out bravely to conquer himself, gains double the reward of those whose mind and idle nature gives them no trouble. You may rest assured that spiritual progress you make will be in direct proportion to the degree of withdrawal from self-love and concern for your own welfare"

### **Evolving into the Divine is Holiness**

Spiritual pursuit is a progressive becoming of the divine in the human. Holiness is the manifestation of the hidden divine richness in the human, a petal-by-petal unfolding of the divine inner core. It is a gradual process of awakening, arising, moving forward, and building each day stone by stone the edifice of the life of Holiness. It is intertwined with one's earnest search and an intense longing for

communion with God and union of hearts. This process is a perennial, patient and slow movement from mere awareness to awakened reality, to intimacy and inner communion. This taste for a continuum and becoming is at the core of one's pursuit of holiness. One may pursue it with conscious effort. But the real pursuit is when the subconscious and the unconscious are involved entirely in this pursuit. In awakened and asleep condition, the soul is in intense longing to be in communion with God. God is there all the time for us. But are humans ready to face this divine presence?

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.....

Your ideas mature gradually. Do not try to force them on...

Only God could say what this new Spirit

gradually forming in you will be. Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete. Above all, trust in the slow work of God, our loving vine-dresser. Amen. - *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

### **The Dream and Cry of a Struggling Soul**

Life changes when thinking changes. Mind is the root of all dreams and goal setting. Determination coupled with a new vision enables the birth of the new. Holiness calls for a radical mindset. It is a dream where sound and silence meet, where words are generated for the greater good of humanity and gets converted into action. This birth of a new dream sets in motion a new practice. This is not an easy practice. It is a strenuous process of discipline and hard work.

Like a plant our growth in holiness is in a slow process of unfolding and becoming of the divine depth. It is a blossoming from within. God is at work and we are the clay in God's hands.

God manifests His / Her divinity in the most humble state which begins with the incarnation, carpentry, public life, beatitudes, sharing everything up to the cross on Calvary.

True humility is strength of character. It endures, suffers, and patiently bears the undeserved moments of persecution which is the sign of holiness. "Humility is strength under control" – this unknown saying gives a clue to holiness.

### **Negotiating Life Journey**

On the journey, one encounters varied terrains. It is not a smooth sail but filled with storms and pit falls, the seashore, the waterfalls, the rugged stony path, the

volcano-prone, the tempest, the tsunami and desert and the like in one encountering the good and the non-good along life's way. The art of living is in the manner in which one confronts different realities and forges ahead one's life journey. In this drama of life, the self undergoes a transformative process in its earnest search of the right grasp of reality. It is a struggle based process where one keeps the goal of holiness in perspective. By the gift of the Holy Spirit, one is inspired to travel the path with integrity and fidelity. One goes through a process of transformative changes which touches and impacts the mind and the heart.

Buddha said, "our mind defines who we are. If we are to find a lasting way to peace, fulfillment and joy, it must be through our minds. For us to find fulfillment, there has to be, sooner or later, a shift from the material and even the corporeal, to the psychical, with a subsequent relinquishing of even the mind. There is evidence now that focusing on what we deeply value for ourselves and for the world brings not just lasting contentment but even better physical health. Contemplation is a way of repeatedly investing attention on what brings us truly joyful and truly meaningful existence."

## **1. Mind Moulding**

Mind is the reflection of the divine faculty in the human. It is the mirror of purity and perfection. Mind is the gateway to bliss. It downloads wisdom and strengthens the will in performing actions towards perfection. Mind is like the horse without blinkers. It fluctuates and flutters from one direction to the other. Therefore steadiness of mind is the key to move forward in holiness. Mind causes all feelings to arise in the self — pleasure and pain, happiness and sadness. It accumulates through greed, it hates through anger, jealousy and revenge. Mind can become infused with inertia, inaction, and laziness. It can take shelter in loneliness, sadness, frustration, and tepidity.

In such a state one needs to be shaken, to emerge from darkness into light. It is through arduous training and practice one can focus attention on the positive influences which emanates from the universe. The sunrise which warms all creation and brings light, life, love and positive feelings, the rain, river, ocean, lakes, which brings vitality, growth, purification, happiness and all life forms energized by its presence. It opens our mind to the Blessings that flow from heaven. Earth, the mountains, valleys, caves, bring the secrets of the creator for the whole of creation. The mother, who holds, sustains and nurtures every living being; the gentle breeze, the wind, the messenger of God who brings good news from the ends of the earth.

Nature is filled with the glory of God and the eye of the mind beholds this vision when it is free from ego, selfishness, anger and revenge. Mind cleansing is the first of the battles to be won by the seeker of perfection. Daily practice of self examination is of utmost importance in becoming aware of ones acquired impressions of negativism willfully, voluntarily and without intention. The very atmosphere where one resides can be of great influence in creating such impressions in the mind. These residues continue to hold sway of our consciousness and either promote or prevent our efforts to move towards holiness and perfection.

The mind must know the stillness which opens the gate way to divine intuition. Contemplation is the act of silencing the mind and entering into the zone of the divine in a thoughtless state. The Indian sages have taught the path of yoga, of control through withdrawal of the five senses. This is the way to enter the deepest recesses of the heart with one pointed attention. It is conceived of as the third eye, or the pearl at the tip of the nose or the below the navel point of concentration. *Pranayama* and self control, *Nama Japa*, and *mantras*, the *Lectio Divina*, the Rosary, the Jesus Prayer are some of the great means of entering into stillness of mind. In regular practice, one needs to be aware that these tools used for entering into the wedding chamber of divine intimacy should not become the road blocks to advance in holiness. It is like using a ladder to climb the terrace and once reaching the terrace one need not carry the ladder to the top. However, the practice of contemplative stillness goes through processes of fluctuations, ups and downs, consolations and desolations. One needs to remain steadfast and constant in this pursuit with *ekagrata*— with one pointed focus and attention. Holiness is divine revelation and a constant communion with steadfastness of heart is a necessary condition to be fostered. At times any one of these tools may get stuck with a person and prevent from advancing to the next stage. Therefore vigilance in one's spiritual life is of utmost importance. At any moment, the mind can tend to lose its focus even unawares. Vigilance in prayer is of great importance.

A psycho-spiritual approach to holiness reveals the reality of conquering the sub-conscious mind. The conscious mind puts forward what one stores in one's sub-conscious mind. The responses and reactions are the outcome of the stored up memory and nurtured memory. One can consciously generate and activate positive thoughts irrespective of the external stimuli. Constant practice makes one perfect in this arena. Once it becomes habitual then whatever be the external circumstance one can be in control of self and be mature in responding to situation. Unwanted emotions could be well regulated and minimized. No one can provoke another except being provoked from within. This is a real battle in holiness. One has to

come to terms with egoism, selfish ambitions and revengeful attitudes. The grace of God is poured into the heart when one consciously strives to be holy. “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience (Col: 3:12). “Cloth yourselves all of you with humility towards one another. For God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties in him for He cares about you” (1Pet 5:5-7). “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Self-motivation and self-examination are the keys to developing right thinking, right attitudes and right action. Every person is the author of one’s own destiny. Self affirmation and confidence are the essential ingredients of creating this destiny. When one’s dignity and self-respect are tarnished then the person is haunted with negative feelings, guilt, anger, revenge and jealousy. At times tepidity and laziness, sadness and loneliness are born as a result. Therefore constant vigilance is the most needed practice. Day by day, stone by stone one must build ones interiority, inner thoughts and positive, compassionate attitudes. Thus mind moulding is a constant struggle. It is a concerted effort and an abundance filled practice. One can see and feel the change taking place in one’s thinking and responding to situations. “You will know them by their fruits” (Mt 7:16).

## **2. Heart Nurturing Values with Intense Interiority**

The seat of wisdom is the heart. While the mind is rational, the heart is replenished with feelings, emotions and intuitive faculty. Heart is the mirror of compassion. It has the capacity to rise above reason and be like the divine reflecting the innate goodness that the human has inherited from the Divine. Love is the language of the heart. It can understand and appreciate, respect and accept the other even in the midst of errors. Heart is the seat of silence where the divine reflection is experientially felt by the devotee. It is the enchanting fest of the soul with God in the interiority of one’s being. Jesus’ expression, “I and the Father are one” is a revelation of this mystical communion. Early morning at the hill side alone in communion with the Father reveals the communion of hearts in a contemplative connectivity. Everything about Jesus sprang from this intimate communion. It is from this experience that Jesus could say, “I am the vine and you are the branches.” “All that the Father has is mine... And him who comes to me I will not cast out.” Jesus promised; “come to me all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest.” This rest is the stillness within the heart listening to the sound of silence where people talk without speaking and people hear without listening.

In Indian Philosophy, four stages of growth in holiness is envisioned. It provides an important landmark in the growth process of spiritual experience.

Relationship with God is seen as in human terms of talking, closeness, reflecting the face of the beloved and merging into oneness. It is a practical way of entering deeper and deeper into intimacy with God.

- A. *Salokya*: Talking with the Lord. It can be an intimate conversation, of questioning, of encouragement, of deep level of satisfaction and remaining in continuous contact.
- B. *Samipya*: Nearness to the divine; to come closer is the consequence of being in conversation with the beloved. Always keep a seat vacant for the Lord to be near. Away from the divine presence the human heart becomes restless and dissipated. The heart longs for the divine and there is a constant communication between the two.
- C. *Saroopya*: Reflecting the face of the divine. It means a transformation that enables the person to become, to look alike which is perceived by those around.
- D. *Sayujya*: being merged in the Lord.

These four stages lead from one to the other in one's contemplative holiness in a progressive manner towards perfection. The Assumption experience of Jesus and Mother Mary reveal to us a mystery beyond our comprehension. The merger of Meera Bai with Krishna.

The battle of life is to remain steadfast in one's quest for holiness. Sanctity is the hallmark of a refined soul. Until the soul attains liberation/sanctity the struggle goes on and on. Yet there is great happiness in the very struggle. Moments of enlightenment occur and one realizes the nearness of the divine. And feel the whisperings of the Spirit in the heart.

Spiritual accompaniment by an experienced guide is of paramount importance.

### **3. Hand-holding in Collaborative Action**

The society we live in is centered around technological and information explosion. When one is not in touch with oneself soon it is possible to be isolated and alone among a crowd of people. This generation with its preoccupation in a world of information explosion, IT connects and tech gadgets occupied is weary, lonely, depressed and well-dressed. It is difficult to know the inner sense from outward appearance. Therefore, hand-holding is an important dimension with a sense of solidarity and genuine concern.

### **3.1 Nurturing the Ability**

Facing the storms — prayer, discernment and reflection — no storm is too strong for Jesus. He could still the raging waters and the fierce storm. The forces of nature were subject to the command of Jesus. In our life journey, we encounter storms. How do we handle them?

Abandon Side tracking. Know your weak spots and protect yourself from error and fall back on the path. Let wisdom be your guide. It is important how the world sees you. But it is more important how you see yourself. Dare to change and ask, “Why not?” why not you turn the tide? Why not you be different? why nor you stand alone? why not you dare to be different?

Beware of pride overtaking. It only leads to emptiness and loneliness. Humility is the door to transformation. Walk the path of the humble God who dares to wash the feet. Reach out to the other in love. This is possible only when we bend low. Attachments are but temporary. Do not cling to them. Nurture the let go attitude.

### **3.2 Overcoming Patriarchal Bondage**

Holiness is continuous process of transformation; from one stage of existence to a better quality, from being oppressed to becoming a liberated person, from ignorance to Human rights to respecting the dignity and freedom of every person to grow and blossom. If holiness is the ability to reflect the divine image from within then how could that image be less in women? Equal recognition of every being calls of a deeper conviction and practice of having proceeded from God. Endowed with divine inheritance, everyone is entitled to be treated and recognized as God’s loving offspring.

### **3.3 The Socio-political Consequence of Holiness**

“What am I? I am a part of the infinite. It is indeed in these words that the whole problem lies. And the cause of everything is that which we call God. To know God and to live is the same thing. God is Life. True religion *is that relationship, in accordance with reason and knowledge*, which man establishes with the infinite world around him, and which binds his life to that infinity and guides his actions and leads to the practical rules of the law: do to others as you would have them do unto you” (Leo Tolstoy, *Confessions*).

Face the battlefield of doing justice: Prophet Micah says: “Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God” (6:8).

Sustainable Development Goals affirmed by the UN is a standing testimony of the one who cares for humanity beyond borders. Wellbeing and health are intertwined in our search for holiness.

### ***3.4 Ecological Connections: Integration with Mother Earth and Father Sky:***

The battlefield in holiness (personal exclusion, egoism, patriarchy, me top competition, alienation in a mechanized context) lure of external attraction.

“One of the first conditions of happiness is that the link between man and nature shall not be broken.” – Leo Tolstoy.

Holiness is the flooding of divine presence and blessings into one’s life. Human being reveals the divine likeness as any other species in nature. Yet we reflect the divine image in our ability to share divine wisdom in our perception and understanding. The divine interpolates into our history and transforms, redeems and restores to its original nature our fallen humanity. We ascend to the divine as the divine descends to meet the human. The incarnation is at the core of this experience of transformation. The Son of God in obedience to the will of the Father humbled himself and became one among us so that we can become one with God. The philosophy of Aurobindo confirms this experience. When the human ascends towards the divine, the divine descends and the this transformative experience results in the super-human experience.

## **4. Enrich All by Gospel Values by Enforcing Human Rights**

Holiness is not a personal possession to be kept under the bushel. Attain the purpose of life by sharing and enriching others life. By placing it on the lampstand. Holiness is not the private property of any individual. It is the gift of God to humanity. Therefore the real life of holiness impacts in the betterment of society. The real struggle is to live by one’s conviction based on the Biblical values following the path of Yahweh and Jesus. In practical terms we are called:

- To do acts of compassion to the vulnerable people such as those pushed to the margins by caste, religion, ethnic belonging, widows, orphans, migrants, refugees, HIV/AIDS infected and affected.
- The language of prophecy is to be used to address the political malady that affects our society. Owe to those who kill the journalists, those who rape women and children; owe to those who are stumbling block in the life of others preventing them from eating cows, preventing them from freedom of expression through arts and culture, preventing them from practicing their religion.

- Resisting Saffron politics and creating awareness on fundamentalism.
- Decry economic fascism and increasing poverty (Oxfam report 2019), accumulation, and amassing wealth by few wealthy (nine families in India who hold wealth equal to more than 50% of the population of the country).
- Deplore the diminishment of democracy and denigrated media bought over by the fundamentalists (death of journalists, Gauri Lankesh,, etc.) naming them urban naxalites, etc.
- Denounce clergy sexual abuse in the church and the silence of the cold mute Indian Church. Women and children have suffered this malady for long and kept hidden.
- To stand up for justice and human rights enshrined in the UN Human Rights, in the preamble of the Indian constitution and in the Beatitudes which beacons the kingdom of God here and now.

Holiness is a political project of God. As we see in the Exodus story, Moses experiences the burning bush, talks with God on Mount Sinai and comes down with Ten Commandments. It is not merely a spiritual discourse but also a political document. It reveals human relationship with God, neighbour, the structures of society and lives by values of integrity, loyalty, sincerity and openness to truth with respect for God and parents as well as fidelity to life partner. These values stand if God is given the central place in our life. This is the holiness we are called to live, respecting others in their quest for holiness.

## **Conclusion**

Our birth is a mystery beyond our grasp. Our life is a gift with the purpose being created in the image and likeness of God. Since this divine gift flows from the creator we possess a “Givenness” from God through our parents and through nature. It is in the very law of nature to be born, to create, to enliven and enrich and enact the divine drama of creation. Every birth is an expression of God’s holiness and fidelity, an original blessing passed on unasked and undeserved. God’s creation is marked and sealed by divine wisdom and infinite holiness. We are the bearers of this heritage in our heredity. Let us witness this call to be perfect as our Heavenly Parent. Thus the life of holiness is a response to the call and a commitment to the one who gives life and calls. Holiness is in the very nature of the human to realize one’s full and true potential. “Be holy as your Heavenly Father is holy.” The creator has placed in each heart a divine thirst which cannot be quenched except in God.

“Our hearts are made for you Lord and they are restless until they find their rest in you.” To be holy is to reflect one’s original order of creation. God breathed God’s very breath into the human. Our breath is a continuity to the breathing exercised by God at the dawn of creation.

## THE WEAPONS NECESSARY FOR HOLINESS OF LIFE

Sr. Irene Leena Pais, UFS

### Introduction

When we decide to pursue a carrier, change of a habit, way of living, or a profession it involves a lot of preparation, hard work, endurance, patience, perseverance and willingness to achieve the set goal. As Christians, our basic commitment is to seek holiness of life. Primarily the vocation of a Christian is holiness (LG 40). The Holy Scripture presents holiness as the *magna carta* or the way of life of every baptized. God who is Holy invites His Chosen People to be just like Him, “Be Holy for I am Holy” (Lev 11:44). This path of holiness is meant for all, but they are varied, diverse and many. All are bound to lead a holy life as Jesus reaffirms saying, “Be holy as the heavenly Father is holy” (Mt 5:48). Holiness for us Christians consists in loving God and loving one another as Christ loved us (cf. Jn 15:13-14).<sup>1</sup> The main purpose of consecrated persons is to be holy.

Christian life is a constant battle, withstanding the temptations of the evil. The battle is not only against laziness, envy, lust etc, but against the devil who is not to be ignored. On this journey, the cultivation of all that is good, growth in love are the best counterbalance to evil. In our spiritual journey to holiness, we need to be alert and attentive lest we slip into lethargy. Here in this article, I have enumerated various spiritual combats for a Holy living; may it be a source to fight and battle the snare of the enemy.

### 1. Temptations to Holiness

The path to holiness is not a smooth passage. Every person journeying on the road to holiness is faced with temptations, struggles, challenges, desperation and guilt.

*Sr. Leena Irine Pais is a member of Ursuline Franciscan Congregation, Mysore Province. She served the province as Postulant Directress, Novice Directress, Junior Directress, Formation in-charge of the Province. She takes classes on Religious life and Vows and Scripture. She also conducts retreat to the Formees and religious sisters. Presently, she is the superior, Provincial Councillor in-charge of initial and on-going formation and Junior Directress. She can be contacted at ireneleena24@rediffmail.com.*

Pope Francis in *Gaudete et Exultate* (GE) presents Gnosticism and Pelagianism as the two subtle “false forms of holiness” from early Church history, still lead us astray (GE 36-62). To combat these enemies, Holy Father says, “The path to holiness involves a battle and calls for an approach of constant vigilance” (GE 158). The temptations can come mainly from the world, devil and flesh. Every person who aspires to be holy encounters spiritual warfare against these entities.

### **1.1 The World**

World is a masterpiece of God’s creation. God created the world and all things in it and he saw that it was good (Gen 1:31). Therefore, the world as such is not an obstacle to holiness and sanctification. It all depends on how we take the things of the world and the manner in which we use them, which can be for good or for evil. The world becomes an obstacle only when we see it as an object of pleasure, comfort, riches, fame, violence, and might.<sup>2</sup> As a result, we fail to see world as the gratuitous gift given by God to be nurtured. In such cases, the world becomes a source of irresistible temptation and a formidable enemy of the holiness of life.

### **1.2 The Devil**

According to St Thomas, “the proper office of the devil is to tempt.”<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, as we know, speaks of devil often and in the Exhortation emphasizes that when we speak of the enemy we are not only dealing with “a myth, a representation, a symbol, a figure of speech or an idea” (GE 161), but “a personal being who assails us” (GE 160). In the *Our Father prayer*, the final convocation is in fact “deliver us from evil”. The enemy’s goal is that of separating us from God, of making us pass from the experience of the forgiven sinner, one who has received mercy, to that overturning of our reality as children of God which is corruption (GE 164-165). Here it is important to exercise great vigilance, because the corrupt are those who experience “a comfortable and self-satisfied form of blindness,” where everything “appears acceptable” (GE 165). Here Satan “disguises himself as an angel of light,” even deceiving and isolating us in the most radical self-preferentiality (GE 165).

### **1.3 The Flesh**

The world and the devil are our principal external enemies, but we bear within ourselves an internal enemy that can be much more terrible. Our own flesh wars against us without ceasing. It is marked with the inherent horror of suffering and desire for pleasures taking deep roots within through senses, distractive memories and imaginations which is an obstacle to holiness. Fear of pain causes fleeing from it

because pleasure brings gratification and the tendency to pleasure is what is known as concupiscence<sup>4</sup> and it is opposed to holy living.

## **2. Gift of Discernment**

The path of holiness is a source of peace and joy, given to us by the Spirit. How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit, not from the spirit of the world or the devil? By discernment. As we are groping in the darkness of the modern world, the Pope invites us to ask for the gift of discernment. He says, “The gift of discernment has become all the more necessary today,” because we are “immersed in a culture of zapping” wherein “we can easily become prey to every passing trend” (*GE* 167). This grace of the Spirit is transformed into a permanent gaze upon reality: what is in our heart our thoughts, feelings, and desires, there, where God inspires, attracts and consoles and the reality that surrounds us, where the Spirit acts by giving rise to what the Council calls “signs of the times” (*GS* 11).

Discernment is a grace. In discernment, the person has to discover, uncover the wholeness and the holiness of God, as revealed in Jesus. “The primary objective of the discernment process is to find God, and in finding Him, to know His will through the radical entering into Christ’s mystery” (*VC* 65). We also see that discernment is an authentic means that answers the demands of being called to live a holy life. Conroy says, “Growing in the art and skill of discernment is a life time endeavor. As we journey with God through the years, our awareness of interior movements becomes more constant, pervasive, and subtle. We develop a habit of paying attention and responding to God’s quiet whisperings. We discover the painful joy of being intimate with God. We experience the mysterious delight of finding God in all things.”<sup>5</sup>

## **3. Means Necessary for Holiness of Life**

If we want to be holy first and foremost we have to desire for it. As the vessel must be sufficiently large to contain the liquid, our soul also must desire for holiness. The desire can be achieved through various means which a person can employ to discern one’s actions, thoughts, and words. Herein, I summarize the important means necessary to sustain our journey towards holy living.

### ***3.1 The Presence of God***

Being holy is a difficult task and cannot be done in the absence of God. Awareness of the presence of God is one of the foundation stones of the spiritual life. The practice of the presence of God consists in recalling as frequently as possible that God

is present in all places, especially in the life of every holy person, and consequently in doing all things in the sight of God, “walk in the presence of God” (Gen 17:1), God said to Abraham. The constant awareness of the presence of God reminds us to avoid even the slightest deliberate fault, helps us to do all things with the greatest diligence and possible perfection, facilitates us to observe modesty in our behavior at all times<sup>6</sup> and increases our desire to embrace holy life.

### ***3.2 The Word of God***

Truly the Word of God has the power to transform lives, for it is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). We must welcome the Word with open mind and heart, as a good ground, so that it is assimilated and bears fruit in concrete life. Pope Francis reflected on when Jesus said that the Word of God is like a grain of wheat: “it is a seed that must grow in concrete works. Thus the Word itself purifies our heart and our actions and our relationship with God and with others and it frees us from hypocrisy.”<sup>7</sup> We must keep ourselves on God’s side of the line of walking in love by continually putting the Word in our eyes, in our ears, day by day, letting God speak to us, listening to His correction and instruction, and letting the Word of God prosper our souls. He will always be correcting us and telling us how to be holy as He is Holy. Our obedience to His Word is an act of holiness, but only if it is motivated by love (1Cor 13). When you act on the Word, the Holy Spirit fills us with his power and frees us from our weakness, selfishness, complacency and pride.

### ***3.3 Sacrament of the Eucharist***

*The Catechism of the Church* teaches, “In the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained” (CCC, 1374). Holiness is the fruit of the Eucharist because it is its fountain. In the Holy Eucharist, Jesus gives Himself completely “for the life of the world” (Jn 6:15) for our lives and for the life of the whole world. The Eucharist is the sublime presence of the love of Christ. It is the permanent, sanctifying, efficacious and powerful love (CCC, 1325). On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus with His chosen disciples, celebrated the Passover Meal, taking the bread and wine, solemnly declaring, “This is my Body” (Mk 14: 22) and “This is my Blood” (Mk 14:24). What is our understanding, love and commitment to the Holy Mass? In the Holy Eucharist, we have the promise of the Emmanuel God, “I am with you always, till the end of the age” (Mt 28: 20) being fulfilled. The Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is also an important daily practice and becomes an inexhaustible

source of holiness. (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 10). We live in times when there is a lot of indifference growing; there are several newer problems and crisis cropping up. We also live in a situation of faith where there is a tendency to dilute many of the spiritual values and there is a strong opposition to living holy and sanctified lives. For all such struggling moments and trying situations, we have an answer and solution in the Holy Eucharist. Jesus the Saviour of humankind truly remains with us in the Holy Eucharist. In the Eucharist, God longs to dwell with us and in us.

### ***3.4 Prayer***

Trust filled prayer of any length is a response of a heart open to encountering God face to face, where the quiet voice of the Lord can be heard.<sup>8</sup> In that silence, we can discern the paths of holiness to which the Lord is calling us. For each disciple, it is essential to spend time with the master, to listen to his words and to learn from him always. Prayer is a powerful resource, one of the most powerful means to become and to remain in holiness. Perseverance in prayer in spite of all difficulty<sup>9</sup> helps us to climb the heights of sanctity. In discernment, we place ourselves in silence and in prayer before the Lord with an attitude of total openness; we are prepared “to listen to the Lord and to others, and to reality itself, which is always challenges us in new ways.” It is only when we “have freedom to set aside our own partial or insufficient ideas, our usual habits and ways of seeing things”, that we are “truly open to accepting a call that can shatter our security” (*GE* 172). Pope Francis, for example, asks “all Christians not to omit, dialogue with the Lord (*GE* 169), thereby creating in our personal life a space for solitude and prayer, where we can read and understand our own life, welcoming God’s call. In daily meditation, contemplation, sacraments, devotions, mortification, practices of virtues, evangelical counsels, good works of mercy and charity we are revealed of God’s love and His will for us.

### ***3.5 The Sacrament of Reconciliation***

Regular reliance upon the mercy of God abundant in the Sacrament of Penance should be a priority in our lives. Confession is the celebration of God’s forgiving and merciful love, seeking His grace to cleanse us from sinfulness.<sup>10</sup> Availing confession regularly is a hallmark of a sound virtuous life through which persons desiring holiness of life ask for healing of the sins committed. Sacrament of Reconciliation is an effective means and frequent confession is a must to achieve personal holiness.”<sup>11</sup> During World Youth Day in July 2013, at the celebration on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, Pope Francis again described how Jesus awaits us in the Sacrament of Penance, telling youth of the world gathered for the event: “with his mercy he will cure all the wounds caused by sin. Do not be afraid to ask God’s forgiveness,

because he never tires of forgiving us, like a father who loves us. God is pure mercy!”<sup>12</sup> The Sacrament of Penance and a Christian life that aspires to holiness are inseparable elements of the same spiritual process for every baptized person. It is much more important and required of consecrated persons to frequent the Sacrament of Penance to obtain grace and holiness of life.

### ***3.6 Examination of Conscience***

The daily examination of conscience is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and discern his direction for us. It is an ancient practice in the Church that can help us to see God’s hand at work in our whole experience. The examination of conscience is a searching of one’s conscience in order to discover the good or evil acts one has performed, and especially to confirm one’s relationship with God and personal sanctification. It leads to view one’s progress in holiness.<sup>13</sup> By means of examination of our conscience, one looks at the reality of both oneself and others through the eyes of God in his heart. Examination is a dialogue with God, where in the person becomes aware of God’s presence in all the experiences of the day.<sup>14</sup> It helps us to grow in discernment and a desire to keep ourselves aligned to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

### ***3.7 Spiritual Direction***

The purpose of spiritual direction is to lead persons to the perfection of Christian life. Spiritual direction promotes interiorization, integration and holiness of life. Person who desires to tread the path of holiness always looks for guidance from a good spiritual director. We have examples in the Scripture and holy people who were guided by the spiritual masters. In the Bible, Moses was directly guided by the Lord himself. Samuel was guided by priest Eli. St. Paul was put under the direction of Ananias (cf. Acts 9:10). St Basil says, “that anyone who desires to have spiritual director need to “choose with the greatest prudence and after a most examination, a man whom you can follow as your guide in the kind of life you have adopted.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, one who desires to be holy, need to choose a wise and learned director to guide him from all the dangers, doubts and perplexities of life.

### ***3.8 Reading: Daily Nourishment for Mind***

Reading spiritual books fosters growth in spiritual sanctity. Our mind is nourished with good reading habits *and* meditation upon Sacred Scripture, books of Catholic tradition, documents of the Church and contemporary literature on the interior life. Professor Joe Mannath states, “Religious should not make your minds

a graveyard.”<sup>16</sup> Spiritual reading offers to the mind a solid food. Cultivate reading habits: to keep our mind focused and holy, the assiduous reading of spiritual books is an efficacious aid to the practice of prayer and the acquisition of knowledge of spiritual doctrine.<sup>17</sup> A good book feeds the mind with holy thoughts, renews the desire to strive for greater perfection, and imparts invaluable knowledge concerning the spiritual life.<sup>18</sup>

The reading of the holy men and enlightened minds help to stimulate the will to greater efforts towards holiness of life. Spiritual reading is praised and appreciated by the saints. St. Bernard says, “Spiritual Reading is very necessary; for by it we learn what we must do and shun, and in what direction we must go. By reading, our minds and souls are enlightened. It teaches us to pray and to labour; it prepares us for active as well as for contemplative life.”<sup>19</sup> “The reading is like the mirror by which we can discover the stains of our souls, the beauty of virtue, the progress we have made or our little advancement towards perfection,<sup>20</sup> teaches St Gregory.

### ***3.9 Genuine Relationships***

According to St. Francis de Sales, one needs friends precisely for three reasons; to know oneself, to bring one’s best self and for self acceptance. Moreover he says, acceptance by a friend is the best way to signify acceptance by God; and acceptance by God is the very basis of our peace, our wholeness and our joy.<sup>21</sup> There are three outstanding advantages that flow from a true and holy friendship. In the first place, a friend can be an intimate confidant to whom one can open the heart and receive advice and counsel when confronted with problems and doubts. Secondly, a friend can be a prudent and compassionate corrector who will frankly points out one’s defects and prevents many acts of imprudence. Thirdly, a friend will console in times of sorrow and remedies in times of trial.<sup>22</sup> We read in Sacred Scripture that a faithful friend is a powerful protector and that anyone who has found such a friend has found a treasure (Sir 6:14-16). Through all the centuries of the Church’s existence, there have been outstanding examples of holy friendship in the lives of saints. The friendship is an alliance of souls who are united to do well. It is necessary that one maintains a strict vigilance lest one’s love should exceed the limits of virtue and become an occasion of evil. In order to avoid possessive, exclusive and obsessive friendship, which is harmful to the spiritual life, the best remedy is to prevent such a friendship<sup>23</sup> from developing. For this reason, it is extremely important that one knows the signs by which one can determine whether a friendship is sensual.

### **3.10 Marian Piety**

In our times, the Blessed Virgin herself has recommended the Rosary: at Lourdes, Fatima and at several other apparitions approved by the Church. According to Sr. Lucia, one of the three shepherd children to whom Our Lady appeared at Fatima in 1917, she said: “There is no problem, I tell you, no matter how difficult it is, that we cannot resolve by the prayer of the Holy Rosary.”<sup>24</sup> The great French preacher St. Louis de Montfort (1673-1716) saw the Rosary as a weapon against evil. For Padre Pio, the saint of Pietrelcina, the Rosary also “is a weapon in our hands with which we can overcome the devil’s attacks.”<sup>25</sup>

### **3.11 Life in the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is a spirit of life, of gifts, of energy, of vivacity, of animation and of dynamism. Where the Holy Spirit is, there is the great movement of the will, the mind and the heart. It was this “sudden” coming of the Holy Spirit that transformed the small group of Jesus’ disciples into mighty warriors of the Kingdom of God. Fear was transformed into power, timidity was changed into boldness, and uncertainty was converted into conviction. The Holy Spirit is the giver of Gifts. A spiritual gift is an ability granted by God through the Holy Spirit, which helps the person to grow in holiness and effectively serve the people of God (cf. CCC, 1832). We need to pray constantly to receive these gifts of the Holy Spirit. Our own lives need an encounter of this “life-transforming” experience. Is my religious life dull and slow merely laced with routine actions of prayers and sacraments? Is my life of faith, lethargic and tepid simply being pulled on, without any particular awareness or lived without any enthusiasm? Each Christian ought to build an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit. Each Christian must become more aware of the role of the Holy Spirit in daily living. We need the mighty movement of the Holy Spirit to bring vitality to our life and faith. In the given context of the world today, we need to ask for gifts of the Holy Spirit to combat the snares of the Evil. We have to be filled with the fruits of the Holy Spirit and live a holy life. Let us realize that by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, we are all rich.

### **3.12 A Martyrdom of 24/7**

Pope Francis aptly reminds us: “you will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, and love by giving love” (*Witness of Joy*, 4). And that life means exposing, not one idiosyncratic self, but that of Christ Jesus (cf. 2Cor 4:10). It is not Monday to Friday, but 24/7. In this life of trials and tribulations as religious, we might approach our sufferings with an attitude of disappointments, bitterness, anger or

retaliation. But as committed disciples, we should take to heart the words of Jesus; “if anyone wants to become my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). He warned us, “In this world you will have trouble” (Jn16:33); “you will be hated by all because of my name” (Mk 13:3). Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Cost of Discipleship* says in the same vein: “when Christ calls a person, he bids him come and die.”<sup>26</sup> This daily martyrdom for the sake of Christ is not a matter of pride, it is our commitment. This is another way to be fruitful in the path of holiness. This brings us joy as we ‘share the sufferings of Christ’ (Phil 3:11). Thus we see Oscar Romero or the Kandamal martyrs of Odisha (2008), or Missionaries of Charity Sisters killed in Yemen in March 2016. They fought the evils of society by their daily martyrdom 24/7 (spiritual combat) in the face of secularization, consumerism and globalization of today.

### ***3.13 Self-control***

We will never escape temptation, even if we exercise holiness in our life. When we face temptation, though, we will need to control the harmful desire to give into it to maintain any degree of holiness. Temptation does not always come in a tangible form. It is relatively easy for many people to resist the temptation of stealing something from the store or physically hurting someone who angers us. It is much more difficult to resist the root temptations of greed, zealously, anger and hate. To really practice self-control, we need to guard ourselves against the weaknesses of character that can distract us from God. These weaknesses include things like pride, envy, greed, hate, slothfulness, gluttony, and lust.<sup>27</sup>

### ***3.14 Perseverance, Patience and Meekness***

When grounded in God, one can overcome aggressive and selfish inclinations and give a witness of constancy in doing good. Being on the path to Holiness means enduring ‘daily humiliations,’ e.g., “those who keep silent to save their families, who prefer to praise others rather than boast about themselves, or who choose the lesser tasks, at times even choosing to bear an injustice so as to offer it to the Lord.” To act in this we need to recognize and combat our aggressive and selfish inclinations through the virtues of perseverance, patience and meekness.

### ***3.15 Community Life***

Community life is a very essential and inevitable part of the religious life. Growth in holiness is a journey of living and working in community with others. Sharing the Word and celebrating the Eucharist gathers and fosters fraternity and makes

us a holy and missionary community. It also gives rise to authentic and shared mystical experiences. Every religious community has to be modeled after the first Christian community who were of one heart and one soul in all the aspects of their common holy living (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32). When we shun all our differences and individuality, life in religious community will become a comfort in pain, an encouragement in difficulties and share in the joys of each other. All religious have to live together carrying and sharing in each other's burden (cf. Gal 6:2) and help every member to fight against the divisions to live a holy life.

### ***3.16 Life of Credibility***

Today's world gives much importance to quality. The most important products of today are those of quality. But quality is not enough. Today there is a need of a brand. And what is the brand for consecrated persons? Paul says it in Galatians: I carry in me the 'mark' of Christ". Something visible: I carry in me the 'mark of Christ,' *the stigmata*. Credibility is to be credible, but it is also to believe in our calling as consecrated people. External challenges, strong and subtle as they are, often weaken our trust, deaden our witness and dampen our enthusiasm. It is time to lift up our heads; show to the world the happiness of our choice. Jesus reveals to us through his life our grand evangelical choice: obedience, poverty and chastity; these should be the brand of recognition.<sup>28</sup> Credibility is the way to live a sure path to holiness.

### ***3.17 Transformative Power of Charity***

When St. Francis of Assisi encountered the poor, he encountered God. He had a conversion experience and he translated that experience into action by his outstretched hands to help the poor. Do our educational, health services, institutions, pastoral and social activities cater to the poor or to the rich, a privileged few? Are we operating as a glorious NGOs hobnobbing with the rich and not even willing to throw a few bits of crumbs from our table to the many Lazaruses who wait at our feet. Let us draw closer to the poor; it will be a favorable moment to encounter the God we seek. Following the Scripture (cf. Gen 18:3-5; Heb 13.2), let us welcome them as honored guests at our table; they can be teachers who help us to live the faith more consistently, and walk the path of holiness. Mother Teresa says the greatest sin of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is 'the sin of indifference'.<sup>29</sup> Saint Francis and his witness of authentic poverty were able to see and serve him in the poor precisely because he kept his gaze fixed on Christ. Charity is one of the weapons to fight out sins of institutionalization and walk the path of holiness.

### **3.18 A Spirituality of Creation**

A spirituality of creation which Pope Francis speaks about is the communion with God the Creator in His creation always and everywhere, as long as we live. God created the Universe and us as the pinnacle of creation. Pope Francis in *Laudatosi* (LS) Says, “Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God with our neighbour and with the earth itself” (66).<sup>30</sup> And further the Pope states in LS 64, “Christians ... realize that their responsibility with creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith.”<sup>31</sup> With great sin and great enemy called ‘destruction and killing’ our Mother Earth we need to protect it with another spiritual combat called ‘the spirituality of creation.’ Could we commune with God in ‘Spirit and Truth’ in His Creation? Breathing him in the air, drinking him in the water, feeling him in the sun/fire, walking/working with him in the earth and existing with him in the space, along with the whole universe? That would indeed be communion with our Father 24 hours of the day (even in sleep, breathing), every moment of our life, in *Our Common Home, Created by God Himself*. A spirituality of Creation is a sure path to holiness.

### **3.19 Genius of Woman**

I would stress too that the ‘genius of woman’ which are an essential means of reflecting God’s holiness in this world. Indeed, in times when women tended to be most ignored or overlooked, the Holy Spirit raised up saints whose attractiveness produced new spiritual vigor and important reforms in the Church. He calls this feminine holiness essential to reflecting the goodness and love of God into today’s culture. Pope Francis affirms that each woman, in her own, unique way, is called to transform today’s world with a beautiful life of holiness through her holy witnessing style. Saint Hildegard of Bingen, Saint Bridget, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint Thérèse of Lisieux are few to be mentioned. Truly amazing Holy lives lived in each era. Among ways of bearing witness are “feminine styles of holiness”, of these famous women saints and the “unknown and forgotten” women who daily transform their communities. As well as through big challenges, holiness grows through small gestures: refusing to gossip, listening with patience and love, saying a kind word to a poor person.

### **Conclusion**

We live in a world where there are often, many wild beasts, ferociously corrupt and unhealthy practice and menacingly abusive evil lifestyles. We need to resist

the temptations arising from such situations and stand firm in our focus and commitment to the Lord and His Kingdom. A tireless effort for growth in holiness has to be the pattern of our daily lives. St. John Paul II says, “the role of Consecrated Religious to inspire in all the faithful this longing for holiness, personal renewal and conversion.” Let us begin with the little ones doing our simple works with much love of God, living our Christian life with much faithfulness, and seeing the deep presence of God in all areas of our life. Let us live a life of self-sacrifice, renunciation and trust in God, a life seeking to do God’s will at all times and a life laced with the tender love of God in all our activities. Let us seek the compassionate and powerful Lord to grow in holiness and sanctity. Let us not get caught up in the snares of temptation instead be victorious and triumphant in the grace and power of Jesus, our Saviour, model and master.

### Endnotes

- 1 T. FEELEY, *Friends in the Lord: Exploring Consecrated Discipleship*, Mumbai 2004, 58.
- 2 J. AUMANN, *Spiritual Theology*, London 1988, 164.
- 3 J. AUMANN, *Spiritual Theology*, 157.
- 4 J. AUMANN, *Spiritual Theology*, 165.
- 5 M. CONROY, *The Discerning Heart: Discovering a Personal God*, Chicago 1993, 241.
- 6 J. AUMANN, *Spiritual Theology*, 360.
- 7 J. MANNATH, “Religious Life”, *The New Leader* (Feb 1-15, 2018) 7.
- 8 J. CATOIR, *Joy: The Spirit’s Gigantic Secret behind the Church’s Survival*, Mumbai 2009, 23.
- 9 J. AUMANN, *Spiritual Theology*, 200.
- 10 J. MANNATH, *A Radical Love. A Path of Light*, Delhi 2014<sup>4</sup>, 186.
- 11 [https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope\\_says\\_frequent\\_confession\\_needed\\_to\\_achieve\\_Holiness](https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope_says_frequent_confession_needed_to_achieve_Holiness).
- 12 [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130728\\_cel\\_ebrazione-xxviii-gmg.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_cel_ebrazione-xxviii-gmg.html).
- 13 J. AUMANN, *Spiritual Theology*, 361.
- 14 R. PAI, “Spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola,” *The Divine Shepherd Voice* 5/1(2014) 100.
- 15 J.B. SCARAMELLI, *Manual of Christian Perfection*, 39.
- 16 J. MANNATH, *A Radical Love A Path of Light*, 193.
- 17 J.B. SCARAMELLI, *Manual of Christian Perfection*, 45.
- 18 J. AUMANN, *Spiritual Theology*, 377.

- 19 J.B. SCARAMELLI, *Manual of Christian Perfection*, 44.
- 20 J.B. SCARAMELLI, *Manual of Christian Perfection*, 47.
- 21 J. "THANDEL "Celibacy and Friendship according ot St Francis de sales," *Bosco Udayam* 48/2 (2018) 24.
- 22 J. AUMANN, *Spiritual Theology*, 378.
- 23 J. AUMANN, *Spiritual Theology*, 379.
- 24 J. RYAN, "Angel of Mercy Saint of the Gutters,Breaking the word ," *A quarterly bulletin of Sunday Homilies* 48/4 (2016) 15.
- 25 J. RYAN , "Angel of Mercy Saint of the Gutters," 16.
- 26 P. ABIR, "Consecrated life", *The New Leader* (Feb 1-15, 2018) 12-13.
- 27 "How to be Holy", [https://www.wikihow.com/Be-Holy#\\_note-4](https://www.wikihow.com/Be-Holy#_note-4).
- 28 P. Villanueva , "Witnesses of the Living God: Nature and Future of Consecrated Life, a Salesian Vision," *KristuJyoti Publications*, Bengaluru, 2013, p. 316.
- 29 J. RYAN, *Angel of Mercy Saint of the Gutters*, 15.
- 30 R. POOTHOKAREN, "Care for Our Common Home," *The New Leader* 131/8 (2018) 12-13.
- 31 R. POOTHOKAREN, "Care for Our Common Home," 132.



# POPE FRANCIS' CALL TO HOLINESS IN THE MODERN WORLD

Dr. A. Pushparajan

## Introductory Remarks

The “Call to Holiness” given by Pope Francis is enshrined in his third Apostolic Exhortation<sup>1</sup> “Rejoice and Be Glad” (*Gaudete et Exultate*).<sup>2</sup> This call, by itself, is nothing new, because Second Vatican Council had already proposed it in its Dogmatic Constitution on Church (*Lumen Gentium*). It had even devoted a whole chapter (Chapter 5) to this theme. However, there is certain newness in Pope Francis’ call, at least in respect of the following four points:

- *Lumen Gentium* presents the call to holiness, by relating it to the mystery of the Church, and explains it as something drawn from the baptismal priesthood of all the faithful, including the laity, and hence it entitles the chapter ‘Universal Call to Holiness’.<sup>3</sup> Whereas Pope Francis’s call is based **on one simple premise**, namely, our Lord’s invitation: “Rejoice and be glad” (Mt 5:12), and hence the title of the document is also the same: *Gaudete et Exultate*
- Secondly, the Pope underscores that our Lord extends this invitation to those who are humiliated and persecuted for his sake. That means, the Pope says: “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**” (*GE* 1). In other words, Pope’s call is meant to wake us from slumber to a wakeful, vibrant and vigilant existence.

*After rendering 33 years of academic service as philosopher, teacher and researcher, Dr. A. Pusparajan formally retired in 2004, and is presently residing in Bengaluru, giving guest lectures in in fields of his specialization. As a perceptive scholar, he is much sought after across the country and abroad. Has been serving as consulter in several Commissions of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India. Been Consulter to the Pontifical Council for Culture (1993-98), Invitee of the UN World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at New York (2000), a founding member of the Association of Christian Philosophers of India, a founding member of World Council of Religious Leaders at Bangkok (2002). Now, member of the Governing Board of the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, Bangalore (2010 - ). A serious thinker and industrious researcher as he is, he has to his credit 450 papers presented in international and national seminars, symposia and Conferences and 330 articles published in professional Journals of Philosophy, Theology and Spirituality; has authored/edited over 32 books.*

- The third aspect of newness in Pope Francis' call is that this document is meant to be a **practical guide** for us to be holy and “not a treatise on holiness, containing definitions and distinctions helpful for understanding this important subject, or a discussion of the various means of sanctification” (GE 2).
- Fourthly, our Holy Father works out the practical guidelines according to the context of the modern world. In his own words, he re-proposes his call in a practical way **for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities.**

Compared with his two earlier Apostolic Exhortations, (*Evangelii Gaudium*, *Amoris Laetitia*) the document on Holiness is rather a small. It consists of 177 small paragraphs, grouped into five chapters. These chapters are logically progressive in their arrangement. In chapter One (3-34), the Pope explains ‘what it means’ to be holy in Christianity. The next chapter (35-62) examines and estimate two ideologies that pose as counter-positions to the call (Neo Gnosticism and Neo Pelagianism) and thus re-iterates the Christian meaning of holiness. Thirdly, Pope Francis focusses on the basic maxims of our Master in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount in the light of which alone we can understand the call to holiness (63- 109). The fourth chapter (110-157) deals with the application-aspects of the call in today's world. The final chapter deals with the method of living out the call.

With this over-all view of the document, now let me now attempt at expounding what it means to be holy according to Apostolic Exhortation of the Pope and the background against which he explains it in the way he does in the document. There are two parts in my paper. First there is the attempt to set the background of modernity against which the second part will elucidate the actual call.

### **Part 1: The Modern World is Context of the Call**

The term ‘modern’ is used generally to indicate something which is “relating to the present-times or the contemporary times as opposed to the remote past”. But, in a more specific meaning, ‘modern’ is used to the times which marked a departure from traditional styles or values.

‘Modern World’ in simple terms means the changed outlook on life, world, culture, literature and philosophy that started first in the Western Europe that was generally science-based, experiments-tested, progress-oriented and forward-looking. It all originated with **Renaissance** (revival of naturalist and humanist approaches to life, art and literature under the influence of classical Greek models in the 14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries). The period of social, philosophical, religious, and political as well as commercial, economic revolutions all of which could be traced to the scientific

approach to life and consequent assertion of the Reason as against authority of Religion. Then the Age of Reason or Enlightenment ranging from mid - 17<sup>th</sup> century and the whole of 18<sup>th</sup> century starts, which covers a period of one century and half generally called the Age of Enlightenment resulting in the bewildering changes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in technological, military, political and cultural institutions of not only the western world, and which spread throughout the world during 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The significant milestone of the modern world was **Reformation** (meaning the Protestant movement that began in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century resulting in major religious changes that swept across Europe transformed not only the religious institutions and worship forms, but also, politics, society, and basic cultural patterns of Europe, until the whole of 17<sup>th</sup> century).

Moreover, the **Industrial Revolution** (meaning the transition to new manufacturing processes in Europe and the US, in the period from about 1760 to sometime between 1820 and 1840) brought about a lot of societal changes. For, this transition included going from hand production methods to machines, new chemical manufacturing and iron production processes, the increasing use of steam power, the development of machine tools and the rise of the factory system.

The Industrial Revolution also led to an unprecedented rise in the rate of population growth. More than that, it began to shake the structure of living in general and the family system in particular. Given the transition of production-processes from hand-tools to power-driven machines, parents could no more be at home but had to move to factories. Wives and mothers also often employed outside the home, leaving children to be cared for by others.

It is in that context, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the State had to recognize women's equal rights legally regarding the ownership of property, the legal aspects of married state, etc. Marriage was seen more as a contractual relationship between a man and a woman that vests the parties with a new legal status.

With the rise of **technological revolution** in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century and the rest of the century was an era of accelerated technological progress, one or more technologies being replaced by another technology in a short amount of time and characterized by new innovations whose rapid application and diffusion caused an abrupt change in society, when the State conferred certain rights and duties on parent and child, education shifted increasingly from the household to the school. Today, as legislation provides equal financial benefits and legal standing to all children, families have increasingly consists of one or two unwed parents and children. Thus basic changes took place in the structure of the family primarily in

the West. No doubt, thanks to the powerful influence of Enlightenment (or Age of Reason) and the emergence of feminist's thinkers and their assertion of equal rights at all levels personal, sexual, economic, educational and professional and political).

However since the Second World War, there has been emerging new trends of questioning and even its rejection of the one, global, unitary meta-narrative scientism and modernism by people everywhere, asserting the uniqueness of the local, indigenous cultures. The present period starting with the Post-World War II generations is actually called postmodernist era.

However, it is undeniable that all the post-modern ideologies ensued from modernity and are having their bearing on the modernity which itself was primarily science-based, religion-revolting, and autonomy-claiming. Besides, the modern trends are still going on perhaps with greater vigour, along with the post-modern trends. Thus, it was precisely the scientific trend that is influencing the latest technological advances, manifest in media or travel facilities. Secondly, it is the very same capitalist economy of the modernity that is present in the corporate economy of the MNCs. Again, the so called globalization trends of today is nothing but the neo-scientific expedition of the modern explorers. So the contemporary world is equally a Modern world, but at a mega level both in intensity and extended scope.

Now, **the contemporary process of globalization**, though originally meant to affect trade and commerce where liberalization and privatization would be encouraged with the chief slogans: "produce more, sell more and buy more", yet has impacted adversely on other realms of life family, culture and society wherein money, wealth and material possessions and acquisitions become the standard measure of one's personality and status.

The worst aspect of today's culture is that an illusion is created that self-gratification is paramount and nothing else matters. People are led to think that they can build a successful family life if they can mutually induce and indulge in self-gratification. The classical idea of marriage that "only the exclusive and indissoluble union between a man and a woman has a plenary role to play in society as a stable commitment that bears fruit in new life"<sup>4</sup> is slowly dwindling. The traditional formulation that "marriages are fixed in heavens and just celebrated on earth" is blown off to winds by the so called educated youth of today. The right way of understanding the traditional statement only means that husband and wife are made for each other and that their fidelity to each other is to be continuously cultivated by a constant effort to know each other, day after day, even till the end of their life, and that they need to rely upon God's grace for sustaining their love relationship in each other.

In sum, it is the post-modernist ideologies which sprang up in the modern European civilization that has made inroads into even the so called traditional societies of the whole world. The socio-religious-politico-economic scenario all over the world is undergoing such a sweeping change that the very foundations of family are shaken and its main axis is at the point of being breaker.

Still worse, some of the postmodernist ideologies promote manipulation of the human person, devaluation of any permanent commitment to family relationship, bringing about severe crises in family life.

The influence of the fast changing IT world is so pervasive and invasive that people seem to get immersed in the hedonistic culture; relativistic viewpoints, materialist approaches to life, individualistic and selfish liberalization of morals. These seem to give rise to a culture which rejects making permanent choices because it is conditioned by uncertainty and transiency. The emerging culture is sure to create a veritable “liquid society” and one with a “throw away” mentality and one seeking “immediate gratification”; and, finally, values reinforced by the so-called “culture of waste” and a “culture of the moment”.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, in today's post-modernist culture there is clear eruption of extreme individualism, crude hedonism, excessive materialism, greedy consumerism, avaricious recognition of women's rights in careerism. As a result people across the globe have begun to accept sheer pragmatism (considering ‘workability’ as truth), steep hedonism (advocating sensual gratification as right), downright consumerism (focusing more on ‘what I have’ rather than ‘who I am’), sharp utilitarianism (using persons for one's own interest), utter individualism (emphasizing one's own views and ideas rather than standpoint of society), outright careerism (giving importance to one's career than anything else), secularism (relegating practice of faith and morals to one's private life rather than seeing as a binding force of the public affairs).

These different ideologies of the present day culture were dealt with by Pope Francis in his first Apostolic Exhortation.<sup>6</sup> Whereas in *Gaudete et Exultate* Pope Francis picks out two ideologies which could run counter to the concept of Christian holiness, because they having “corruptive” influences (*GE* 165-166) on the pursuit of holiness:

1) Neo-Gnosticism claims that its “explanations can make the entirety of the faith and the Gospel perfectly comprehensible”. It ‘absolutizes its theories and forces others to submit to its way of thinking’ (*GE* 39). “While it unduly exalts knowledge or a specific experience, it considers its own vision of reality to be perfect” (*GE* 40).

(2) Neo-Pelagianism “is a theory which holds that one can achieve holiness simply as a result of one’s efforts, one’s punctiliousness about following the rules, or some other form of moral achievement. Actually, neo-Pelagianism tends to over-estimate humans and their projects, forgetting that the Savior is God and not us. Hence, Pope affirms that “reconciliation is not, as the neo-pelagianists think, our private initiative or the fruit of our personal commitment, but God’s (GE 57f).

In sum, these two ideologies are “two forms of doctrinal or disciplinary security that give rise to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyses and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others” (GE 35).

It is against this background that the Pope is giving the call to holiness in the way he does. What is it, will be seen in the next Part.

## **Part 2: Pope Francis’ Call to Holiness**

Traditionally, holiness has been identified with ‘saintliness’ meaning ‘the high ethical and spiritual quality which is characteristic of one’s life and conduct.’ It meant first and foremost ‘the notion of a separation from the world and a consecration to God’ and is pursuance of a high ethical ideal which the holy God demands of those whom He has called to be His people.<sup>7</sup> God, who alone is holy, has granted us ‘justification’ a once-for-all, **positional holiness** in Christ. Now, God guides us to maturity, a practical, **progressive holiness**. In the future, God will give us glorification, a **permanent, ultimate holiness**. These three phases of sanctification separate the believer from the penalty of sin (justification), the power of sin (maturity), and the presence of sin (glorification).<sup>8</sup>

Further the idea of saints we had in the classical traditions often portrayed people who had so completely attained the holiness, and completely cut off from us, ordinary humans that they could be venerated, by putting up statues on their altar and to whom we can pray for intercession. But they could not be followed by us. They are unattainable, far above the actual struggles of life and our limitations and faults and failures.

As against such a traditional concept, Pope presents holiness not necessarily as matter of heroic achievement or extraordinary mystical experience, but rather as something that can be worked out in day to day affairs., like the parents who raise their children with immense love, those who work hard to support their families, the sick and the elderly religious who never lose

their smile (*GE* 7). Even the biblical exemplars that he mentions are such of “Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Gideon and others whose “lives may not always have been perfect, yet even amid their faults and failings they kept moving forward and proved pleasing to the Lord” (*GE* 3). The Pope also refers to living witnesses like our own mothers, grandmothers or other loved ones, those who living in our midst reflect God’s presence, impelling us to advance constantly towards the goal”. “Nor need we think only of those already beatified and canonized (*GE* 6). Even outside the Church boundary there are numerous saints. The Holy Spirit bestows holiness in abundance among God’s holy and faithful people, for “it has pleased God to make men and women holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather as a people who might acknowledge him in truth and serve him in holiness” (*LG* 9). “We should not grow discouraged before examples of holiness that appear unattainable” (*GE* 11).

That doesn’t mean being content with sin or failure. Nor is it a matter of adapting oneself to the idea of being a sinner, as if, almost, to justify it. “That annuls the power of conversion. But we always have to come back to this key point: God treated me with mercy. That’s the key for becoming a collaborator of God.”<sup>9</sup> What is important thing is “that each believer discerns his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts (cf. 1Cor 12:7), rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them. We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness” (*GE* 11).

In reference to the Missionaries of Mercy, again, the Holy Father brought out the same point. No doubt, “to be an effective missionary of mercy, a priest must first himself be transformed. But, he asserted that transformation is not a matter of extraordinary experience or spiritual gifts.” Again, he said “it’s not a matter of becoming ‘seized’ priests, almost as if they’re entrusted with an extraordinary charism.” He reiterated that they be ordinary priests: “No, we’re talking about normal priests, simple, mild, balanced, but capable of allowing themselves to be constantly regenerated by the Spirit, receptive to its strength, free on the inside — above all, from themselves — because they’re moved by the ‘breath’ of the Spirit that blows where it will.”<sup>10</sup>

As he often does, Pope Francis makes specific mention of the “genius of woman” as feminine styles of holiness as an essential means of reflecting God’s holiness in this world (*GE* 12). Not only the famous women saints like Saint Hildegard of Bingen, Saint Bridget, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, but also “all those unknown or forgotten women who, each in

her own way, sustained and transformed families and communities by the power of their witness” (GE 12). They have personally nurtured the holiness of many great saints like Pope Francis, and Mahatma Gandhi deeply.

Another misconception that is prevalent in the Catholic Church is that to be holy one must be either an ordained priest or a bishop, or be religious, a consecrated person. People frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who have withdrawn from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. Pope’s reaction to such popular impressions: “That is not the case”.

We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by labouring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain (GE 14).

Next, the Pope asks us to “let the grace of our baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness” (GE 15). For it is the fact that “The Holy Spirit bestows holiness in abundance among God’s holy and faithful people.” Here he invokes the theme of the “universal call to holiness” proposed by Vat. II and the diversity of holiness it taught: “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” (LG11).

Yet another misunderstanding of holiness is that some special role in the Church required for holiness. As against it, Pope Francis says that we can enthuse ourselves to transform “small gestures” daily routine into something holy. As an example he suggests this: While a woman goes shopping, and meets a neighbour and begins a chitchat with her, it may turn out to be gossip against someone else. Suppose at that time she tell in her heart: “No, I will not speak badly of anyone”. This is a step forward in holiness. Later, when she comes home tired, her child wants to talk to her about her hopes and dreams, she is tempted to slide her. But if she resists it and she sits down and listens with patience and love, it is another sacrifice that brings holiness. When she is anxious about something, she prays rosary with faith, recalling the love of the Virgin Mary, she has taken already one more step in her path of holiness. Still later, if she meets a poor person and stops to say a kind word to him. One more step (GE 16).

True, we may need to face some special challenges in life through which Lord wants to undergo a conversion. The Pope assures us by saying: “Through them, the Lord calls us anew to a conversion that can make his grace more evident in our lives, “in order that we may share his holiness” (Heb 12:10). At other times, we need only to find a more perfect way of doing what we are already doing: There are inspirations that tend solely to perfect in an extraordinary way the ordinary things we do in life (GE 17).

We may fail. But we need not be discouraged much less depressed by focussing on our weakness. For, God has willed us to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” and the Risen Christ “shares his own risen life with our fragile life. In this way, our lives demonstrate his power at work even in the midst of human weakness” (GE 18).

A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness. 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 (GE 19).

Here the Pope is inviting us never to consider pursuit of holiness as a side aspect of our mission, not even as a big part of our life-mission but to see the intimate “connection between our mission on earth (life’s work) and our holiness” and carry out mission as pursuit of holiness. This is possible only when we learn the art of relating our mission to Father and Spirit, and much specifically to Jesus, our Master.

Here, the Pope explains the specific meaning of ‘Christian’ holiness:

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 family at Nazareth, his life in community both in village and later the larger society, his closeness to the outcast, his poverty and other ways in which he showed his self-sacrificing love (GE 20).

Granted that we believe really in the Incarnation of Christ, then we should incarnate the mysteries of Jesus “in our choices and attitudes”. Citing from *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), Pope Francis explains the reason for his view:

Because “everything in Jesus’ life was a sign of his mystery” (515), “Christ’s whole life is a revelation of the Father”, (516) “Christ’s whole life is a mystery of redemption”, (517), “Christ’s whole life is a mystery of recapitulation” (518). “Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us” (521).

Here, we need to reflect seriously: ‘Are we just devotees of Jesus busy with novenas and prayers? Or are we serious about our discipleship of Jesus, living out the Gospel values of Jesus?’ We need to deny ourselves the easy way of being just devotees and challenge ourselves to become really brother /sisters of Jesus, the incarnate Lord.<sup>11</sup>

Finally it is by “the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life on his. Every saint is a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people” (*GE* 21). In reference to Gal 5:22-23, the Holy Father affirms that “the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this”. After all, “holiness is ultimately is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (*GE* 15).

So we need to be constantly in touch with the Holy Spirit. For, “the measure of our holiness stems from the stature that Christ achieves in us, to the extent that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life on his”. Every saint is a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people (*GE* 21). Hence, the Pope makes this plea with us:

Always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received. Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today’s world (*GE* 22).

Here a question may be raised: “How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit or if it stems from the spirit of the world or the spirit of the devil?” To this Pope gives ‘discernment’ as the answer.

Discernment is itself a gift from the Holy Spirit. If we ask with confidence that the Holy Spirit grant us this gift, and then seek to develop it through prayer, reflection, reading and good counsel, then surely we will grow in this spiritual endowment (*GE* 166). It is definitely “more than intelligence or common sense”.

Certainly spiritual discernment does not exclude existential, psychological, sociological or moral insights. But it transcends them. We should always remember that discernment is a grace. Even though it includes reason and prudence, it goes beyond them, for it seeks a glimpse of that unique and mysterious plan that God has for each of us, which takes shape amid so many varied situations and limitations. It has to do with the meaning of my life before the Father who knows and loves me, with the real purpose of my life, which nobody knows better than he. Ultimately, discernment leads to the wellspring of undying life: to know the Father, the only true God, and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 17:3). It requires no special abilities, nor is it only for the more intelligent or better educated. The Father readily reveals himself to the lowly (cf. Mt 11:25) (*GE* 170).

Discernment is necessary not only at extraordinary times, when we need to resolve grave problems and make crucial decisions. We need it at all times, to help us recognize God's timetable. Often discernment is exercised in small and apparently irrelevant things, involves striving untrammelled for all that is great, better and more beautiful, while at the same time being concerned for the little things, for each day's responsibilities and commitments. For this reason, Pope admonition is very relevant: "I ask all Christians not to omit, in dialogue with the Lord, a sincere daily "examination of conscience" (*GE* 169). Such an examen would be sterile were it not a discernment of spirits, and discernment would not be complete were it not the constant attitude of prayer that the examen fosters.

Above all, silence is a requirement for a proper discernment.

The Lord speaks to us in a variety of ways, at work, through others and at every moment. Yet we simply cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer, which enables us better to perceive God's language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light. In this way, we allow the birth of a new synthesis that springs from a life inspired by the Spirit (*GE* 171).

It is not healthy to love silence while fleeing interaction with others, to want peace and quiet while avoiding activity, to seek prayer while disdaining service. Everything can be accepted and integrated into our life in this world, and become a part of our path to holiness. We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission (cf. *GE* 26).

Hence, we cannot ignore "the need for moments of quiet, solitude and silence before God". More so in today's context of "the presence of constantly new gadgets, the excitement of travel and an endless array of consumer goods" which "at times leave no room for God's voice to be heard" (cf. *GE* 29). "We need a spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelizing efforts, so that every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord's eyes. In this way, every minute of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness (*GE* 31).

### **Finally,**

To those who have feared holiness on the ground that they would be considered overly pious or weird because one was holy, Pope Francis, gives these soothing words: "Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality

or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self” (GE 32).

To those who may be afraid of allowing themselves to be challenged by God, Pope Francis gives these words of assurance: “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” (GE 34).

In a way, Pope sums up his call to holiness in the words of the great French Novelist León Bloy: When all is said and done, “the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint” (GE 34).

Are we ready to take up the call?

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This document is *Apostolic Exhortation*, and hence it ranks below an encyclical but above papal homilies and speeches. The authority of the papal documents is ranked in the following order.

- *Apostolic Constitution* (solemn Magisterial acts of the Pope).
- *Encyclical* (Letter of solemn authority generally on matters of faith and morals).
- *Apostolic Letter* (Letters of less solemn authority than an encyclical, expressing the mind of the pope on doctrinal matters).
- *Apostolic Exhortation* (Similar to Apostolic Letter, but communicating the conclusions he has reached after consideration of the recommendations of a Synod of Bishops touching the life style).
- *Common Declaration* (A joint statement of the Holy Father and another religious leader concerning a common understanding of some teaching).
- *Homily* (on the Scripture readings at Mass).
- *General Audience* (on Wednesdays) Pope gives an opportunity to public to hear him usually to develop a theme over a long period. (An entry ticket, which is free, is required).
- *Allocution* –( formal /authoritative talk by the Pope in private audiences with individuals and groups on a pertinent subject).
- *Discourse* (talks given outside the settings of the Mass or Audience).
- *Message* (Written or spoken often conveying a personal greeting, to individuals or groups).

<sup>2</sup> The Latin name *Gaudete et Exsultate* (GE) dated 19 March 2018.

<sup>3</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 39-42

<sup>4</sup> AL 52

<sup>5</sup> *Instrumentum laboris*, III Extraordinary General Assembly on The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization, 2014, no. 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2014

<sup>7</sup> “Holiness”, Archived on January 10, 2019 from <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/holiness/>

<sup>8</sup> “What is sanctification? What is the definition of Christian sanctification?” Archived January 10, 2019 from <https://www.gotquestions.org/sanctification.html>

<sup>9</sup> Words uttered by Pope Francis in the mass offered with the Missionaries of Mercy, as quoted by JOHN L. ALLEN JR. “In Multiple Ways, Pope Francis Lays out a Spirituality of the Ordinary” in *Crux* Apr 11, 2018, Archived on November 6, 2018 <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2018/04/11/in-multiple-ways-pope-francis-lays-out-a-spirituality-of-the-ordinary/>

<sup>10</sup> JOHN L ALLEN JR, *op.cit* above

<sup>11</sup> JERRY, *Be Happy and Be Holy*, Chennai 2018, 14.



## ***GAUDETE ET EXULTATE*** **– A GUIDE TO CONSECRATED LIFE**

**Dr. James Niravath, OCD**

### **Introduction**

There are discoveries and inventions which opens a new horizon of knowledge and information to people and to the world. There are also untarnished paths, which exists but not yet used — pristine state of things. Still there are reforms and renewals to get a new vigour to the existing situation. In his apostolic exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (“Rejoice and be Glad”), Pope Francis proposed ways and means for a renewal and reform in the lives of the faithful: “To re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities” (*GE* 2). Without delving too much into a theological or heady definition of holiness, Pope Francis invites us simply and straightforwardly to open ourselves to the specific and unique mission of God for the world.

He explains to the Church, in a special way to the consecrated people, about achieving holiness in the modern world. Pope Francis wants to tell us that holiness is not something else apart from our everyday life, but it is exactly our ordinary existence lived in an extraordinary way. He is reminding Christians that the desired goal of their journey is true life, joy, meaning and fullness found in Jesus with the help of divine grace and the action of the Holy Spirit.

The “Universal call to holiness” was actually named and emphasised by the document of Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, and that is grounded very soundly in the history of the Church. It is not only a call for bishops, priests and consecrated people, nor only for those who live a life dedicated exclusively to prayer. But it’s also calling for practical application in the life of the Christian that is why he focuses so much on the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew 25. It’s a very well-crafted exhortation from the standpoint of helping us to see how to live a Christ-like life. “Be holy, because I am holy” (Lev 11: 44-45; 1Pet 1:16).

*Fr. James Niravath, OCD is a member of Carmelite Order. He had his higher education in Liturgy and Sacramental Theology and holds doctorate in Theology. He is a professor in different theological institutes. Currently, he is serving as the Rector of Carmelaram Theology House, Bangalore. He can be contacted at jniravathocd@gmail.com*

Call to Holiness is a magnanimous theme from the very beginning of the history of the Church. The call and teaching of Jesus in the Gospel, in the documents of Vatican II, St. Therese of Lisieux [...]. The high-minded theme “call to holiness” or all are called to Holiness is not a new message in the Catholic Church. The title is taken from the end of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:12: “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.” This new document (*GE*) is particularly relevant — inspiring and exciting! —for the consecrated people, who are called to bring the light of Christ into the ordinary tasks of their daily lives in the world. Wishing to emphasize that holiness is a call for all the consecrated people, the pope writes of several examples of saints who lived out holiness in very different situations and times, such as St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Josephine Bakhita, St. Teresa of Calcutta, and St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Vincent Pallotti, St. Joan of Arc, St. Francis de Sales and others.

## **2. Call to Holiness in Indian Spirituality**

In the Indian prayer and spirituality also we can see this invitation and expression: *Sreyo bhuyat sakala jananam* (may all people be happy and prosperous/let the whole of humanity attain excellence) (*Maitreem Bhajata of Shri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati*). They believe that only those who are united with the Lord / participated in his holiness, can possess happiness.

## **3. Call within the Call**

We used to repeat the wonderful lines from the Holy Scripture in the Liturgy of Hours: “to be holy and blameless before him in love,” (Eph 1:4) and it also reminds us the invitation of Second Vatican Council “each in his or her own way,” called to be holy (*LG* 5:39). Pope Francis moves in the same direction, that is why he reminded us not to try to copy examples of holiness because this could even lead to separation from the “one specific path” that God has thought for each one. It should be according to the Spirit and Charism of each and every congregation. St. Therese of Lisieux calls it *call within the call* and in the life of God’s pilgrim people, there can be many simple gestures of pure adoration, as when “the gaze of a pilgrim rests on an image that symbolizes God’s affection and closeness. Love pauses, contemplates the mystery, and enjoys it in silence” (*GE* 155).

## **4. Canon Law**

The official interpretation of the rules and regulations of the Church, *The Code of Canon Law (CIC)* has given a wonderful definition for consecrated life:

Consecrated life is a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having dedicated themselves to His honour, to the building up of the Church and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in service to the Kingdom of God (Can. 573 § 1).

Each person is different and the Charism of each congregation is different. The call is to discern the way in which each person can bring to light “the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts” (*GE* 11). Holy Father again insists, in the importance of each person to grow “towards that unique plan that God willed” for which we were chosen (*GE* 13). Each and every religious is called to be his instruments and messengers in the world. God has an important message to tell the world through each and every consecrated person, to the extent that we discover it, we will be able to pass it on with our daily lives in a faithful manner (cf. *GE* 24). So our lives become the proclamation.

Once we are fully realised the depth of the call within the call, it needs to be committed to the search of justice and the building of the Reign. It is essential to continue deepening it, purifying it, updating it. That brings a great amount of joy and happiness in our lives. Thus, in the midst of the risk involved in putting into practice the beatitudes and the difficulties of living the works of mercy, committing ourselves fully to the following of Jesus, we can “rejoice and be glad” (Mt 5:12). This joy and happiness should be radiated in the community and in the area of our apostolate.

St. Teresa of Calcutta, one of the most beloved saints of our time, has also recognised this divine call and the call within the call. Her call from the Lord to leave teaching to take care of the poor has inspired thousands of people all over the world. God spoke to her heart and she listened, responding with great faith to what she said was her “call within a call.” On 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1946 during the train ride from Calcutta to Darjeeling for her annual retreat, Mother Teresa received her “inspiration,” her “call within a call.” On that day, in a way she would never explain, Jesus’ thirst for love and for souls took hold of her heart and the desire to satiate His thirst became the driving force of her life. Over the course of the next weeks and months, by means of interior locutions and visions, Jesus revealed to her the desire of His heart for “victims of love” who would “radiate His love on souls.” “Come be My light,” He begged her. “I cannot go alone” (Sermon by St. Pope John Paul II on 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2003).

The same spirit and meaning we can see in the Indian/Hindu spirituality. In *Gayathri manthram* it is clearly said:

*Bhur bhuvaha suvaha,*

*tat savitur varenyam,*

*Bhargo devasya dheemahi*

*(Body of all, mind of all, spirit of all, may we meditate on the radiance of inner light as sacred truth and this sacred truth will guide you to Holiness).* The aim of our journey, as consecrated people, is to find out the goal of our life. The source of inner light is also an inevitable factor (*GE* 169-170).

## **5. Our Journey**

Our life is a journey, like that of prophet Elijah, to reach at the Mount of the Lord (1Kg 19:8: *And he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.*). In the same manner, Pope Francis exhorts us to engage in a journey that takes place in the concrete life situation here and now of our daily lives, in small gestures and little things, like St. Therese of Lisieux and her spirituality, in which we are led more and more by God's grace. This journey makes us more alive and more human. It is in our daily lives as consecrated people, the little moments, where we can become holy, particularly in service to others (Mt. 25, 40) whether that means living virtuously in our community and congregation, serving the poor in our area, and other spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

We can espy a typical example of his broad vision and desire to include all categories of people in the letter of Pope Francis:

I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence. We might call them 'the middle class of holiness (*GE* 7).

## **6. Spiritual Warfare**

In the final chapter, Pope Francis repeatedly mentions the devil, who he calls "more than a myth" and against whom Christians need to wage constant spiritual

warfare. “We should not think of the devil as a myth, a representation, a symbol, a figure of speech or an idea,” he says. “This mistake would lead us to let down our guard, to grow careless and end up more vulnerable. The devil does not need to possess us. He poisons us with the venom of hatred, desolation, envy and vice. When we let down our guard, he takes advantage of it to destroy our lives, our families and our communities” (*GE* 161).

## **7. *Gaudete et Exultate* and Consecrated Life**

Since we are reflecting on the theme “*Gaudete et Exultate* – A Guide to Consecrated Life”, I would like to bring to your attention the three inevitable elements which constitute consecrated life. They are:

- 7.1. Prayer Life – connected with our personal life
- 7.2. Community Life – with the members of the community
- 7.3. Apostolate – connected with the society

Now we will be proceeding our reflections on the writings of Pope Francis about the call to holiness of the consecrated people in *Gaudete et Exultate* under these three titles:

### **7.1 *Prayer (147-157)***

- 7.1.1. *Openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration (147)*. It is actually a personal invitation of Pope Francis to contemplate on that great mystery. There will get the clear perceptive of the “the Holy”, but not fully - *All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him* (Mt 11:27).
- 7.1.2. St. John of the Cross, the great Spanish Mystic compared our growth in prayer life with the ascending of a mountain. He has given that wonderful name to his classic – Ascent of Mount Carmel. St. John of the Cross tells us: “Endeavour to remain always in the presence of God, either real, imaginative, or unitive, insofar as is permitted by your works” (*Degrees of Perfection*, 2). “Try to be continuous in prayer, and in the midst of bodily exercises do not leave it. Whether you eat, drink, talk with others, or do anything, always go to God and attach your heart to him” (*GE* 148).

- 7.1.3.** For St. Teresa of Avila, the mistress of prayer in the universal Church, prayer “is nothing but friendly intercourse, and frequent solitary converse, with him who we know loves us” (*Autobiography* 8, 5). “I would insist that this is true not only for a privileged few, but for all of us, for we all have need of this silence, filled with the presence of him who is adored” (*GE* 149).
- 7.1.4.** Even the Holy Father is suggesting a wonderful theme for the meditation: “*contemplation of the face of Jesus, died and risen, restores our humanity, even when it has been broken by the troubles of this life or marred by sin. We must not domesticate the power of the face of Christ*” (*GE* 151).
- 7.1.5.** Again he speaks of the different stages and aspects of Prayer to guide the Church, especially the consecrated people to lead them through the path of Holiness. Prayer of supplication is an expression of a heart that trusts in God and realizes that of itself it can do nothing. The life of God’s faithful people is marked by constant supplication born of faith-filled love and great confidence. 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 (*GE* 154).
- 7.1.6.** A consecrated person needs a heart to listen to the voice of the Lord. In the stillness of his heart the voice of the Lord will clear and will enable him/her to grow in spiritual life. Many a time the prayer becomes the expression of our sentiments, intensions and needs. To grow in holiness, we should listen to the voice of the Lord. The Lord speaks to us in a variety of ways, at work, through others and at every moment. Yet we simply cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer, which enables us better to perceive God’s language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light. In this way, we allow the birth of a new synthesis that springs from a life inspired by the Spirit (*GE* 171).

In many occasions, we can very well see the keen interest of the Holy Father through his inspiring talks to lead the consecrated people to holiness. It is very clear from the reflections of the Holy Father in one of the gatherings of some 700 consecrated men and women on

4<sup>th</sup> May, 2018 at the Vatican's Paul VI Hall. He insisted very much on this aspect of prayer. (It was a conference organized by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life). "Prayer, poverty, and patience are essential to live a true religious life". He was reflecting on the discernment and proposing – how to avoid losing oneself among worldliness and provocations. "Now, with the new forms of consecrated life, Holy Spirit is so creative, with the charisms [...]. He is the author of diversity, but at the same time is Creator of unity. This is the Holy Spirit. And with the diversity of charisms and many things, he makes a unity of the Body of Christ, and also the unity of consecrated life. And this too is a challenge."

For the consecrated person, prayer is "turning always to the first call ... to that Person who has called me". Consecrated life is a call to renounce all things for the sake of the gospel, and for the consecrated person "every prayer has to turn back to this [...]. Prayer is that which makes me work for the Lord, not for my interests or for the institution in which I work, no, for the Lord."

#### **7.1.7.** *Meeting with the Lord*

Pope Francis reiterated that for the consecrated person prayer is a return to the meeting with the Lord in which they were called by him. "And prayer, in the consecrated life, is the air which makes us breathe that call, renew that call. Without this air we could not be good consecrated persons. We would be perhaps good persons, Christians, Catholics who do many works in the Church, but consecration you must continually renew, in prayer, in an encounter with the Lord."

The Pope went on to say that there are no excuses for not devoting time to prayer, including busyness, pointing to St. Teresa of Calcutta as an example. Someone might say: "But I'm busy, I'm busy, I have so many things to do," he pointed out, stating "prayer is more important: Go pray." St. Teresa of Calcutta had concerns, he acknowledged, yet "the two hours of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, nobody took them away from her [...]. Do as she did, do the same."

#### **7.1.8.** *Speak with the Lord*

Another reason for the importance of prayer for men and women in consecrated life, he said, is that it helps to direct action to the correct

purpose, keeping the focus on God, instead of just serving an institution or one's own interests. "Search for your Lord, the one who called you [...]. Not just in the morning," he said. "Everyone must look for how to do it, where to do it, when to do it. But always do it, pray. One cannot live the consecrated life, one cannot discern what is happening without speaking with the Lord."

The Pope writes this exhortation as one who walks and prays beside us so that our desire for God finds expression in our daily lives and enables us to share a happiness that the world cannot take from us. That is why he has written: "Amid the thicket of precepts and prescriptions, Jesus clears a way to seeing two faces, that of the Father and that of our brother. He does not give us two or more formulas or two or more commands. He gives us two faces, or better yet, one alone: the face of God reflected in so many other faces. For in every one of our brothers and sisters, especially the least, the most vulnerable, the defenceless and those in need, God's very image is found. Indeed, with the scraps of this frail humanity, the Lord will shape his work of art" (*GE* 61).

## **7.2. *Community Life (140-146)***

**7.2.1.** As consecrated people, our growth in holiness is a journey in community. Living together, sharing the Word of God and celebrating the Eucharist together fosters fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community. Here he gives the example of the Japanese martyrs Saint Paul Miki and companions, and many more. "In many marriages too, each spouse becomes a means used by Christ for the sanctification of the other" (*GE*141).

**7.2.2.** Living or working alongside others is surely a path of spiritual growth. Saint John of the Cross, the Carmelite Saint and Doctor of Mysticism, told one of his followers: "You are living with others in order to be fashioned and tried" (*GE* 141). A consecrated man or woman cannot think of his/her mission on earth without seeing it as a path for holiness. It is a presentation of the earthly life of Jesus in the living community: His hidden life, His life in community, His love and concern for the poor and marginalised, His simple style of life and other ways in which he showed his self-sacrificing love. Above all he tried to become one with the community and prayed for the unity in the community (*Jn* 17).

As it is narrated in the story of Zacchaeus, Jesus is always in the midst of the people (Lk 19:3). Holy Father says openly that the “Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others” (GE 140-146). The common life, whether in the family, in the parish, in the religious community or any other, is made up of small everyday things. This was true of the holy community formed by Jesus, Mary and Joseph, which reflected in an exemplary way the beauty of the Trinitarian communion. It was also true of the life that Jesus shared with his disciples and with ordinary people (GE 143). Pope invites all the faithful, especially the consecrated people to go ahead through this path: “Let us not forget that Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details” (GE 144).

### **7.2.3.** *Inculturation*

The Holy father expresses through his writing his great desire to bring all people to the main stream through the various examples from the world Church. Notably, Pope Francis frequently quotes from recent documents of non-European bishops’ conferences (New Zealand, West Africa, Canada, India, and Latin America). He tries to include all in the community and wants to show that all are part of the community — the Church. Since he is from Latin American background, he wanted to say the faithful or Church leaders are not second class Catholics. All are equal before Christ and all are part of the community — all are called to holiness.

Again he tries to present another form of community for us to be examples in our spiritual journey. Holiness is “as a path toward God” with saints and prophets acting as signposts indicating the right way for the faithful to go: Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Carlo Maria Martini, the Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri, St. Faustina Kowalska, St. John of the Cross, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Teresa of Calcutta, Charles de Foucauld, etc. (most of the non-magisterial sources are European). Actually he wanted to show that they were the part of the community and they have become saints. It is a simple psychology and teaching that you can also become a saint in your context. Everyday holiness one might have expected more examples from the lives of lay saints who lived their lives in the secular world. Through this expression he wanted to inspire, motivate and encourage all to reach that goal — Holiness — all are called to holiness.

### **7.3 Apostolate**

Pope Francis wanted to motivate the people, especially the consecrated people, to change and move away from our culture of indifference to a culture of mercy, love, joy, and holiness. “*We can get so caught up in ourselves that we are unable to recognize God’s gifts*” (GE 126). The strong reason behind this statement is his own experience in Latin American countries.

Again he is so much worried about the developing culture of modernisation in today’s world. “The presence of constantly new gadgets, the excitement of travel and an endless array of consumer goods at times leave no room for God’s voice to be heard. We are overwhelmed by words, by superficial pleasures and by an increasing din, filled not by joy but rather by the discontent of those whose lives have lost meaning” (GE 29).

#### **7.3.1. *Method of Christ***

He wanted to introduce again the method of Christ — preaching through life. It is stronger than all other forms of evangelisation. We need a heart filled with mercy and compassion. That will touch the heart of the people and that will lead us to holiness. “Seeing and acting with mercy: that is holiness” (GE 82).

#### **7.3.2. *Mercy and Compassion***

Mother Teresa of Calcutta (born in Albania, formed in Ireland and worked in India) — a woman lived in our culture, coming from another culture after knowing the need of the people — acted with mercy and compassion. There’s the idea of being contemplatives in action, finding God in the midst of your daily life, making your daily activity a place of sanctification. The result of contemplation should be reflected in our life styles.

The great danger of today: instead of understanding his/her own situation and potentialities, going after many role models of the modern world. All are running after the tendencies of the modern world. As consecrated people, are they part of this group or victim of these tendencies? That is why he clearly stated: “The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts, rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them” (GE 11).

### 7.3.3. Modern World and the Challenges

Modern world is really thirsting for true love and to find out the real meaning of life. At the same time, there are so many faces of injustice, corruption, brutality, plundering and exploitation. Out of that pain he wrote: “How many people suffer injustice, standing by powerlessly while others divvy up the good things of this life” (*GE* 78). As consecrated people, are we ready to do something for the betterment of the world, to lead the world to holiness?

At last I wanted to bring a beautiful sentence from the Apostolic exhortation of the Holy father for our reflection: “Let us rethink our usual way of doing things; let us open our eyes and ears, and above all our hearts, so as not to be complacent about things as they are, but unsettled by the living and effective word of the risen Lord” (137).

We all are called to Holiness!



## SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

A biannual published by Sanyasa Institute for Consecrated Life, Bangalore

*Sanyasa: Journal of Consecrated Life* is a biannual publication of scholarly reflections committed to the Re-visioning and Renewal of Consecrated Life.

It welcomes the contributors with openness to express their views freely and responsibly.

Views expressed by the contributors are their own and do not necessarily manifest the view of the Editor and the Editorial Board.

The editors are indeed grateful to all the Priests and Religious for your encouragement and support and above all looking forward to your patronage.

Manuscripts for publication and books for review should be addressed to: **Executive Editor**, and business communications (correspondence, subscription, change of address) to: **Circulation Manager**

SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Sanyasa

Carmelaram Post

Bangalore – 560 035, Karnataka, India

Tel: 080 – 28439259; 28439944

E-mail: [sjbancmf@gmail.com](mailto:sjbancmf@gmail.com) / [sanyasac@gmail.com](mailto:sanyasac@gmail.com)

Web: [www.sanyasa.com](http://www.sanyasa.com)

Dear Subscribers:

*Kindly note the change in the rate of subscription of the Sanyasa: Journal of Consecrated Life. Since the beginning of the publication of this Journal in January 2006, we have been keeping the same rate. Now due to the escalation of the costs involved, we have decided to increase the rate of subscription minimally. We hope that our subscribers will understand this change and support this only Journal on Consecrated Life, published in India.*

*The new rates of subscription are as follows:*

INDIA	SRI LANKA	OTHER COUNTRIES
One year ₹ 120	One year ₹ 285	One year US\$ 30
Two years ₹ 220	Two years ₹ 520	Two years US\$ 50
Three years ₹ 320	Three years ₹ 755	Three years US\$ 70
Five years ₹ 500		

**Yes! I wish to subscribe to**

**SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE**

I am enclosing DD / Cheque no. .... dated ..... drawn on (specify bank) ..... favoring SANYASA for ₹ ..... (add ₹ 15/- for non Bangalore cheques).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Pin: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_



# **ICL: Institute of Consecrated Life - SANYASA, Bangalore**

INCORPORATED TO PONTIFICAL LATERAN UNIVERSITY, ROME  
AND CHRIST {DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY}, BANGALORE

## **Biennial Programs:**

1. LICENTIATE IN THEOLOGY OF CONSECRATED LIFE  
(June 12, 2019 - March 2021: Offered by Pontifical Lateran University, Rome)
2. MASTERS IN THEOLOGY OF CONSECRATED LIFE  
(June 12, 2019 - March 2021: Offered by Christ {Deemed to be University}  
Bangalore)

## **Annual Program:**

1. ONE YEAR DIPLOMA IN THEOLOGY OF CONSECRATED LIFE  
(June 12, 2019 - March 2020)
2. SIX MONTHS DIPLOMA ON THE WORD OF GOD

## **Summer Programs:**

1. THREE WEEKS INTENSIVE COURSE ON NEW TESTAMENT  
(April 05-26, 2019)
2. ONE MONTH INTENSIVE COURSE ON CONSECRATED LIFE  
(April 29 - May 30, 2019)
3. FOUR WEEKS INTENSIVE COURSE ON THE OLD TESTAMENT  
(April 29 - May 29, 2019)

## **Online Program:**

1. ONE YEAR OF ONLINE COURSE ON THEOLOGY OF CONSECRATED  
LIFE: (February - December, 2019)

## **Features:**

- ❖ Possibility for both Ecclesiastical and Civil Degrees.
- ❖ A collaborative effort with the Claretian Institutes of Consecrated Life in Rome, Madrid and Manila.
- ❖ Open to all consecrated persons and those interested in consecrated life.
- ❖ Open also to Foreign Students.
- ❖ Option: Residential and non-residential.
- ❖ Subsidized Fees in order to promote studies and research in consecrated life.

## **Requirements:**

- ❖ B.Th. for the Licentiate and Bachelor's degree for the Masters
- ❖ Adequate knowledge of English
- ❖ Personal Interview (if called for)

## **For further details and for application forms:**

Website: [www.sanyasa.com](http://www.sanyasa.com)

Address: The Secretary, Sanyasa Institute

Carmelaram P.O., Bangalore - 560 035, Tel: 080 - 2843 9259, 2843 9944

Mobile: 00-91-996 416 1332 | 831 085 7049 (Director)

E-mail: [sanyasac@gmail.com](mailto:sanyasac@gmail.com) or [sanyasa.in@gmail.com](mailto:sanyasa.in@gmail.com)

**S A N Y A S A**

Journal of Consecrated Life

Sanyasa, Carmelaram Post, Bangalore - 560 035, Karnataka, India

Tel: 91-80-28439259; 28439944

Mobile: 00-91-996 416 1332 | 831 085 7049 (Director)

E-mail: [sanyasac@gmail.com](mailto:sanyasac@gmail.com); [sanyasa.in@gmail.com](mailto:sanyasa.in@gmail.com); Web: [www.sanyasa.com](http://www.sanyasa.com)