

THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL



Evangelii Gaudium

Additional Resources

To read *Evangelii Gaudium* in its entirety, go to:
www.vatican.va/evangelii-gaudium/en/index.html

Books

Through the Year With Pope Francis: Daily Reflections, Ed. Kevin Cotter (Our Sunday Visitor, 2013).

Only Love Can Save Us, Pope Francis (Our Sunday Visitor, 2013).

New Beginning, New Hope, Pope Francis (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

New Evangelization: Passing on the Catholic Faith Today, Cardinal Donald Wuerl (Our Sunday Visitor, 2013).

Forming Intentional Disciples, Sherry Weddell (Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).

The Parish Guide to the New Evangelization: An Action Plan for Sharing Faith, Fr. Robert J. Hater (Our Sunday Visitor, 2013).

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A Commitment to Life

In a powerful defense of the right to life and the dignity of the human person, Pope Francis makes it clear that the Church will always oppose abortion, because it is nothing less than an offense against God himself. He argues that fighting for the right to life is not a “conservative” stance, but one that is the very foundation of all human rights:

Yet this defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable, in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving other problems. Once this conviction disappears, so do solid and lasting foundations for the defense of human rights, which would always be subject to the passing whims of the powers that be. (213)

The pope goes on to say that we must do more to accompany women “where abortion appears as a quick solution to their profound anguish, especially when the life developing within them is the result of rape or a situation of extreme poverty” (214). Missionary discipleship means that we share in the responsibility to reach out to women who are faced with such painful situations and people who are suffering for innumerable reasons.



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Mary, Mother of Evangelization

In the final section of the pope’s message, he lifts up Mary, the Mother of God, as a model for us to follow in the work of evangelization. Because Mary was present with the disciples at Pentecost when they experienced the missionary power of the Holy Spirit, she is rightly the mother of the evangelizing Church:

Mary was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love. She is the

handmaid of the Father who sings his praises. She is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives. She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain.... As a true mother, she walks at our side, she shares our struggles, and she constantly surrounds us with God’s love. (286)

Let us join Pope Francis and the whole Church as we pray:

*Mary, Virgin and Mother,
 you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
 welcomed the word of life
 in the depths of your humble faith:
 as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,
 help us to say our own “yes”
 to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,
 to proclaim the good news of Jesus.
 Mother of the living Gospel,
 wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones,
 pray for us.
 Amen. Alleluia! (280)*

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I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.” (3)

In his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (“The Joy of the Gospel”), Pope Francis offers his sweeping vision of our Church and a “call to action” for the world’s believers. The document covers a wide range of topics, including evangelization, the priesthood and preaching, Catholic opposition to abortion, an increased openness to the roles of women and the laity, economic injustice, and more.

At the heart of his vision is a powerful invitation for each of us to embrace Christ’s call to spread the good news of the Gospel through evangelization and missionary discipleship. He notes that the joy of the Gospel and our encounter with Christ should lead us to “the delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing” (9).

Becoming missionary disciples means that we live and share our faith through our words and, most importantly, our *actions*. The pope encourages us to begin by renewing our relationship with Jesus Christ.

The pope writes a letter of **apostolic exhortation** to encourage (“exhort”) believers to engage in certain behaviors and actions. While an **apostolic exhortation** is higher in authority than many other papal writings, it does not define Church doctrine.

Rejoice and Be Glad

Sacred Scripture calls us to joy-filled belief and witness. Pope Francis notes, “The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ’s cross, constantly invites us to rejoice” (5). His focus on the new evangelization places vigorous emphasis on urging Christians everywhere to spread the Good News with gladness: “Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!” (10).

And yet, we wonder, who are we to evangelize? In a world where a culture of secularism and nonbelief is pervasive, to whom are we called to share the light of Christ? First, the pope calls us to evangelize believers, including those Catholics who no longer attend Mass. We must seek “to help believers to grow spiritually so that they can respond to God’s love ever more fully in their lives.” Next, we must reach out to “*the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism,*” who lack a meaningful relationship to the Church and no longer experience the consolation born of faith.” And, finally, the pope reminds us that evangelizing is “first and foremost about preaching the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him” (15).

Lest we feel overwhelmed by the responsibility to share our faith (with joy no less!), Pope Francis reminds us that evangelization is the Lord’s work – with the gift of grace, we follow where the Holy Spirit leads. He expands on this idea with a quotation from the 2007 *Aparecida* document (which came out of a meeting of Latin American bishops): “Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others” (10).



Evangelizing with Love

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others... An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. (24)



The Parish Is the Church Alive

Pope Francis’ vision is a Church devoted to missionary discipleship. He stresses the need to avoid overly bureaucratic systems and procedures in favor of following the Gospel’s call to love and care for our neighbor:

More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: “Give them something to eat” (Mk 6:37). (49)

The pope calls for parishes to continually renew and re-create themselves to better meet the needs of today’s parishioners so as to form disciples and send them forth into the world. He stresses the need for liturgically centered preaching that really engages the listener, and he encourages parish ministers to remain faithful to the Gospel and continue to grow in “missionary dynamism” (81).

The pope also suggests that structures within the Church need to experience a renewed sense of conversion to the mission of outreach to meet the demands of today’s modern world. Nowhere is this more essential than in the local parish.

With a palpable understanding of parish life, Pope Francis notes that because the parish is in touch with the lives of ordinary Catholics, it is the very “presence of the Church ... an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship, and celebration” (28).

A Compassionate Economy

Evangelization takes many forms. Pope Francis devotes a significant portion of his message to the global economy, calling for the creation of a more just system of the distribution of wealth and resources. In a strong critique of a culture of prosperity, Pope Francis urges the world economy to remember the poor:

Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us. (54)

Pope Francis also calls our attention to the widening gap between rich and poor throughout the world and how the transformative message of the Gospel stands counter to many of our current economic systems.

