



**GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE
(REJOICE AND BE GLAD)**

STUDY

OVERVIEW

Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad)

SUMMARY

As an apostolic exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* is a letter to the whole world on a specific theme: in this case it is “On the call to holiness in today’s world.” As such, Francis is speaking individually to each person or each community on holiness and not speaking of larger geopolitical issues. It is a summary of what is often called “spiritual theology” which is not dogma but the path we should all follow to become holy.

The title means “Rejoice and be glad” and is taken from Matthew 5:12. The title is also the first words of the document, “Jesus tells those persecuted or humiliated for his sake, ‘Rejoice and be Glad.’” Francis’s goal is to show us both the happiness of a holy Christian life and call us to live up the demands that life entails.

CATEGORIES OF INTEREST

Holiness, Spiritual Growth, Spiritual Theology, Happiness, Beatitudes.

TIMEFRAME

If doing it as a small group, I’d recommend 5 sessions: 1 for each chapter, covering the intro and summary in the first and last session respectively. Chapters 3 and 4 are also longer so could easily be spread out over two sessions.

If doing so on your own, then read and study at your own pace but I would recommend that you do whole chapters together as Francis tends to build out over each chapter.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Each participant needs:

- A copy of *Gaudete et Exsultate*
- Free (webpage or PDF): http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html

- Buy print version:

Pauline: <https://store.pauline.org/english/books/on-the-call-to-holiness-in-todays-world#gsc.tab=0>

OSV: <https://smile.amazon.com/Gaudete-Exsultate-Holiness-Todays-World/dp/1681923297/>

- This study guide.

Certain handy documents that might be kept at hand:

- The Catechism of the Catholic Church
- Bible

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Anyone can participate because the Pope addresses the document to all people. Given the themes, I might break up groups into relatively homogenous small groups for better discussions. Such unity could be based on several factors such as place in the spiritual life or life situations (single, new moms, grandmas, etc.).

STRUCTURE

Each chapter (or session) begins with an introduction to the material followed by questions. The questions can be divided two ways—these two categories have no special labeling. First, some questions are more about comprehension while others are for reflection on what Francis said, and often both are mixed. Second, 18 out of 87 questions are labelled “optional” as they are not key points of the document but are helpful for someone who wants to be thorough. The introduction can be read before reading the chapter and/or as a reminder of what was previously read when you begin a group discussion. The questions here are meant to help you understand and reflect on the text, and to apply the text to your life and the lives of those around you. Paragraph numbers are after each question, so if nobody knows the answer or has any comments, you can look it up. I have tried to make questions so that any group can start a discussion. Feel no obligation to answer every question but try to have a good discussion about how you can all be holier.



INTRO & CHAPTER I

The [Universal] Call to Holiness

CONSIDERATIONS

To begin this document, Pope Francis wants to indicate certain characteristics of the universal call to holiness. He begins by talking about the saints and moves from there into our everyday lives. This chapter is not too concrete in how to be holy but wants us all to know that although we are each called to holiness, there is not a uniform call to holiness.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you see in the introduction? What is the goal of the document? (1–2)
2. What can we say about the saints who went before us? Are we united with them in any way? In what way? (3–4)
3. Optional: What does the Church seek when she beatifies or canonizes people? (5)
4. What does Francis mean by the saints “next door”? Is every Christian called to holiness? What are some ways normal people can be saints? (6–8)
5. Optional: How does Catholicism share holiness with other Christian traditions? (9)
6. What does Vatican II say about the universal call to holiness? (10)
7. Are we called to be holy in the same way? What are some differences you note between the holiness you personally are called to and that of some saints you admire? (11)
8. Optional: Is holiness restricted one sex or the other? (12)
9. Is some special role in the Church required for holiness? What sacrament gives us our call to holiness? Is holiness restricted in who might be able to achieve it? (14–15)
10. Can you think of examples in your life like the Pope gives in 16–18 (especially 16)? Do I face any special challenges like he mentions in 17? (16–18)
11. Is there a connection between our mission (life’s work) and our holiness? How does this relate to Jesus? To the

Father? To the Holy Spirit? Is it a big part of our life or simply a side aspect? (19–21, 23–24)

12. Optional: Is holiness about details? (22)
13. Does Jesus’ kingdom matter? How does it matter? (25)
14. How can I spread Jesus’ kingdom? Do paragraphs 26 and 27 give me any ideas? (Paragraph 29 clarifies 26.)
15. Does the intention we do acts with matter? What are some bad intentions Francis mentions? Do I see this in my life? (28—Francis uses “anxiety” in a non-medical sense. If you struggle with clinic anxiety issues, that isn’t an obstacle to holiness but part of your path to holiness.)
16. How does our prayer affect our action? Do we need prayer to be holy? What are some obstacles to prayer? (29–30)
17. Have I have feared holiness? Have I feared being considered overly pious or weird because I was holy? What does Francis say about this fear? (32)
18. Do holiness and fruit work together? Should we have limits on the holiness we seek? (33–34)

NOTES



Two columns of horizontal lines for writing.



CHAPTER 3

In the Light of the Master [the Beatitudes and Matthew 25]

CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter is the central chapter of this document. It consists of a small and a big meditation on Scripture applied to our lives. The first and larger meditation is based on the beatitudes, and the second shorter meditation is based on the final judgement in Matthew 25. Each of these tries to draw out the various lines of Jesus like “Blessed are those who mourn,” or “I was thirsty and you gave me to drink.” This is the longest and most beautiful chapter so if you want to take two sessions for this chapter, it’s fine.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does Francis say, “The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card”? What does he mean? (63)
2. Optional: What are the various words that are synonyms for “Blessed” in the beatitudes?
3. What direction do the beatitudes push us in? What do they ask of us? (65–66)
4. What truths does Francis draw out of “Blessed are the poor in spirit”? Where does he suggest security be put? How does he compare earthly wealth to the God’s word? How does he relate “poor” and “poverty of spirit”? (67–70)
5. How does Francis approach the beatitude of “Blessed are the meek”? What tendencies does this beatitude counter? How does this relate to Jesus’ revelation that he is “gentle and humble of heart”? How does this relate to other Biblical concepts like the gifts of the Holy Spirit or the poor faithful remnant? (71–74)
6. What did Francis say about “blessed are those who mourn”? Does this relate to our entertainment driven culture? How? How does it lead us to the deeper meaning of life? (75–76)
7. When he goes over, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” what does Francis teach? How does Jesus fulfill his promise “they shall be filled”? Is his justice the same as the justice of this world? What distinguishes his justice from human justice? How does justice relate to holiness? (77–79)
8. What did Francis say about, “blessed are the merciful”? What are the two aspects of mercy? How does this relate to the golden rule? How is mercy God’s perfection? Can we reproduce it? What degree of forgiveness does Jesus ask us? (80–82)
9. How does Francis treat, “Blessed are the pure in heart”? What is the “heart” in Biblical language? How does love relate to our actions? What can tarnish love? (83–86)
10. Analyzing, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” what does Francis focus on? How does gossip relate to being a peacemaker? Is peace a political or a personal reality? Or both? How can we sow peace around us? (87–89)
11. What does Francis say about “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake”? Are we called to go with the flow or against it? Is the Gospel path easy? What are some difficulties today? Can the cross be avoided in the Christian life? What does the cross do for the Christian? What are some modern persecutions? (90–94)
12. Which one of these beatitudes touched me the most? Which can I apply to my own life today? Which do I need to grow most in?
13. Now we move to Matthew 25:31–46 which describes the final judgment. How does Jesus refer to himself in this passage? (95)
14. What is the connection, according to John Paul II (quoted) between Jesus and our neighbor? How should we respond to finding a fellow human in trouble? Is this responsibility only an individual commitment or involve wider social issues? (96–99)
15. Optional: What are the two ideological errors? Do you see yourself tending to one or the other? (100–103)
16. Is prayer part of my vision of the Church? What makes her different from an NGO? (100)
17. What does it mean to relativize the issues the Church deals with? Is every life sacred? Can we ignore the life of anyone? What are the people I have the most trouble defending? (101–103, note: this is the flipside of John Paul II who would emphasize that you can help the



CHAPTER 4

Signs of Holiness in Today's World

CONSIDERATIONS

The signs of holiness dealt with in this chapter are virtues or qualities, not individual cases of holiness. Francis is summarizing characteristics that are all found when holiness is present: different types of holiness will be more exemplary in one or another sign but such is the beauty of holiness like a multifaceted diamond. He deals with virtues like patience, meekness, boldness, passion, and prayfulness that cause holiness to be present, but he also covers the results of holiness such as community and true joy.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does Francis frame the five signs in the first two paragraphs? How do the beatitudes relate to them? What are they contrary to? (110–111)
2. What is the basis of the first sign, perseverance? How are we called to treat evil? (112–113)
3. Optional: What should we cling to in the face of evil inclinations in our heart? What inclination do I struggle most with? How does God grant peace? (114, Note: “anxiety” in the passage is a reference to the anxieties of every day, some people have more clinical anxiety which may require therapy and medication, not just prayer.)
4. How does Francis refer to negative dialogue online? What is the dangerous dichotomy? What aspect of the 8th commandment does he see as missing? What fights against this verbal violence? How can I better communicate online? (115–116)
5. Are we judges over others? Should we try to see their good or their imperfections? What is needed for humility? How did the apostles treat humiliation? Is humiliation pleasant? Is it masochistic? (117–120)
6. What does accepting humility presuppose about our relationship with Jesus? What does his peace mean for the Christian life? For my personal life? (121)
7. What is my image of a saint's face? Is it dreary or joyful? Which does Francis say is the right one? (122)
8. What are some examples of the joy from the saints? What do the Old Testament Prophets say about it? What about Mary? Do saints share their humor with us? (123–124, 126)
9. Optional: How does joy help us deal with the cross? (125)
10. How can we compare the joy of the Gospel and the superficial happiness of our world? Is joy focused on what we already have or what we want to acquire? Is it satisfied with what we have? (127–128)
11. What is *parrhesía* (spiritual boldness)? Is our boldness in proclaiming the Gospel different from our boldness elsewhere? What does Paul VI say are obstacles to this? (129–130)
12. How do we see spiritual boldness in Jesus? How does the Holy Spirit bring us spiritual boldness? What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and fear? (131–133)
13. Optional: What are some temptations we have against spiritual boldness? Are we like Jonah? Which do I struggle most with and what can I do to conquer them? (134)
14. What are some spiritual elements that increase our spiritual boldness? How does God's newness and Jesus open door to our heart affect that? Can we ask for such boldness? (135–136, 139)
15. What does complacency reveal? How can we overcome it? Who might inspire us: both who Francis lists and from our own experience? (137–138)
16. What does community bring to the Christian life? Is holiness a personal or communal quest? What are some examples of communal holiness? How should each Christian community show forth the Lord? Is my community living up to this ideal? If it isn't, how can I change that? What does Jesus' prayer “that they all may be one” (John 17:21) have to do with Christian community? (140–143)
17. Does Christian community include details? What are some examples of details? Is love in the details? How? (144–145)
18. Optional: What importance does prayer have regarding holiness? What does John of the Cross say about being in God's presence continually? How does he say prayer



CHAPTER 5

Spiritual Combat, Vigilance and Discernment

CONSIDERATIONS

In this final chapter, Francis wants to conclude with a brief treatment of several important things for the spiritual life. He wants to, on one hand, remind us that the spiritual life is a battle and, on the other, remind us that we need discernment to determine the right path on the spiritual life. This double-focus avoids the tendency to water down the spiritual life on one hand, and to be reckless or one-size-fits-all on the other side. He concludes by entrusting our holiness to Mary. This chapter is a little shorter and has some final questions as well to think about and discuss regarding the whole exhortation.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is the Christian life a battle? What is our struggle against? Is the devil a real enemy? What standards do we need in order to see the devil? How does Francis respond to the idea that illness used to be seen as demonic? What is the problem of considering the devil a myth? (158–161)
2. What does the Bible tell us to do regarding the devil? What are the weapons of spiritual combat? How can we counteract him? (162–163)
3. What does holiness and spiritual peace require? What does it mean to fall into spiritual corruption? Can we deceive ourselves? (164–165)
4. How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit? Is common sense enough? (166)
5. Why is discernment needed? What contemporary realities make it more urgent? What are some times we might need it more? Is there something I need to discern? (167–168)
6. Is discernment only needed in grave times or in everyday situations? How can we practice it daily? (169)
7. Optional: Do the other fields—like morals, psychology and the like—have any bearing on discernment? Can discernment just become a psychological exercise? What is the most key action to be able to discern? How does prayer help us discern? Does prayer require opening to

the spirit? How can we be open and listen? (170–173)

8. How can we grow in understanding God's timetable? How is happiness a paradox? Are there limits in what should be open to God? Is discernment just introspection? (174–175)
9. Conclusion / Optional: How does Mary lead us to holiness? What does Francis see as the goal of these reflections? (176–177)

FINAL DISCUSSION / REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What have I learned about the path to holiness? How can I apply it to my spiritual growth?
2. Do understand the call to holiness given to each Christian? Given to me? What ways is my holiness specific to me?
3. Can I define Gnosticism and Pelagianism? Do I see their signs in our society? Do I firmly reject them?
4. How did reflecting on the beatitudes lead me to see holiness better? Which beatitude do I need work on most?
5. Where can I see signs of holiness? How can I promote signs of holiness?
6. Do I understand Christian spiritual combat? Do I understand discernment? Do I apply them in my life?
7. What is the top lesson or two I can take from reading this exhortation?

NOTES



