

JOY OF THE GOSPEL

Excerpts from Pope Francis's Exhortation

Pope Francis presented to the Catholic World on the Feast of Christ the King (2013) his exhortation *Joy of the Gospel*. This is not a document of doctrine, but a proclaiming of hopes and dreams inviting people to experience Jesus as we see Him in the Gospel. This exhortation which is meant to be a blueprint for pastors and people brings significantly different directions and flavors to the Church many of us have known for years. I present to you excerpts from the entire document that hopefully you will find applicable to your spiritual needs and hopes. The entire document can be found on the internet under the *Joy of the Gospel* in many different search engines. This pointed and practical vision of Pope Francis is broken up into an introduction and five chapters. These excerpts in four pages only give you a taste up to the completion of chapter three.

THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL

Introduction

3 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 unflinching each day. No one should think this invitation is not meant for him or her, since 'no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.'

7...our "technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy."

11 A renewal of preaching can offer believers, as well as the luke-warm and the non-practicing, new joy in the faith and fruitfulness in the work of evangelization.

13 The believer is essentially "one who remembers."

14 The first setting of evangelization is the ordinary pastoral ministry, which is "animated by the fire of the Spirit so to enflame the hearts of the faithful who regularly take part in community worship and gather on the Lord's Day to be nourished by His word and by the Bread of Eternal Life. In this category we can also include those members of faithful who preserve a deep and a sincere faith, expressing it in different ways, but seldom taking part in worship. Ordinary pastoral ministry seeks to help believers to grow spiritually so they can respond to God's love evermore fully in their lives.

Chapter I – The Church Transforming

22 God's word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself, even as the farmer sleeps. (Mk 4: 26-29). The Church has to accept the unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.

24 The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy. Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved.

35 Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusions, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing.

43 In her ongoing discernment, the Church can also come to see that certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some which have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated. Some of these customs may be beautiful, but they no longer serve as means of communicating the Gospel. We should not be afraid to re-examine them. At the same time, the Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people’s lives. Saint Thomas Aquinas pointed out that the precepts which Christ and the apostles gave the people of God “are very few”.

44 I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord’s mercy which spurs us on to do our best.

47 The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.

Crisis in Commitment

53 Just as the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequity. Such an economy kills.

64 We are living in an information-driven society which bombards us indiscriminately with data – all treated as being of equal importance – and which leads to remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment. In response, we need to provide an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral values.

66 The Family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis. The weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children.

70 Nor can we overlook the fact that in recent decades there has been a breakdown in the way Catholics pass down the Christian faith to the young. It is undeniable that many people feel disillusioned and no longer identify with the Catholic tradition. Growing numbers of parents do not bring their children for baptism or teach them how to pray.

85 One of the more serious temptations which stifles boldness and zeal is a defeatism which turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, “sourpusses”. Nobody can go off to battle unless he is fully convinced of victory beforehand. If we start without confidence, we have already lost half the battle and we bury our talents.

101 We all have our likes and dislikes, and perhaps at this very moment we are angry with someone. At least let us say to the Lord: “Lord, I am angry with this person, with that person. I pray to you for him and for her.” To pray for a person with whom I am irritated is a beautiful step forward in love, and an act of evangelization. Let us do it today! Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love!

102 Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the People of God. The minority – ordained ministers – are at their service.

103 The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess. 8

Chapter Three – Proclaiming the Gospel

113 The salvation which God has wrought, and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone. God has found a way to unite himself to every human being in every age. He has chosen to call them together as a people and not as isolated individuals.

118 We cannot demand that peoples of every continent, in expressing their Christian faith, imitate modes of expression which European nations developed at a particular moment of their history, because the faith cannot be constricted to the limits of understanding and expression of any one culture. It is an indisputable fact that no single culture can exhaust the mystery of our redemption in Christ.

134 Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture.

(The next part requires understanding some specific words – Thus I add four definitions not in the text.)

Definition:

Homily – an exposition of Scripture and its current application to our lives.

Catechesis – a systematic instruction, eg. from catechism

Kerygma – the proclamation of the Christian Faith – its heart eg. (Acts 2: 30-36)

Evangelization: the communication of the Christian Faith to others

135 The homily is the touchstone for judging a pastor's closeness and ability to communicate to his people. We know that the faithful attach great importance to it, and that both they and their ordained ministers suffer because of homilies: the laity from having to listen to them and the clergy from having to preach them! It is sad that this is the case. The homily can actually be an intense and happy experience of the Spirit, a consoling encounter with God's word, a constant source of renewal and growth.

137 It is worthy remembering that "the liturgical proclamation of the word of God, especially in the Eucharistic assembly, is not so much a time for meditation and catechesis as a dialogue between God and his people, a dialogue in which the great deeds of salvation are proclaimed and the demands of the covenant are continually restated". The homily has special importance due to its Eucharistic context: it surpasses all forms of catechesis as the supreme moment in the dialogue between God and his people which lead up to sacramental communion.

143 In the course of the homily, the hearts of believers keep silence and allow God to speak. The Lord and his people speak to one another in a thousand ways directly, without intermediaries. But in the homily they want someone to serve as an instrument and to express their feelings in such a way that afterwards, each one may choose how he or she will continue the conversation.

147 I want to insist here on something which may seem obvious, but which is not always taken into account: the biblical text which we study is two or three thousand years old; its language is very different from that which we speak today. Even if we think we understand the words translated into our own language, this does not mean that we correctly understand what the sacred author wished to say.

165 The centrality of the kerygma calls for stressing those elements which are most needed today: it has to express God's saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; it should not impose the truth but appeal to freedom; it should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness and a harmonious balance which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are at times more philosophical than evangelical.

174 Not only the homily has to be nourished by the word of God. All evangelization is based on that word, listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to. The sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelization. Consequently, we need to be constantly trained in hearing the word. The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized. It is indispensable that the word of God "be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity."

175 The study of the sacred Scriptures must be a door opened to every believer.