

EVANGELII GAUDIUM

1. The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come.

I. A joy ever new, a joy which is shared

2. The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.

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 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".^[1] The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: "Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace". How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another "seventy times seven" (Mt 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards!

4. The books of the Old Testament predicted that the joy of salvation would abound in messianic times. The prophet Isaiah exultantly salutes the awaited Messiah: "You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy" (9:3). He exhorts those who dwell on Zion to go forth to meet him with song: "Shout aloud and sing for joy!" (12:6). The prophet tells those who have already seen him from afar to bring the message to others: "Get you up to a high mountain, O herald of good tidings to Zion; lift up your voice with strength, O herald of good tidings to Jerusalem" (40:9). All creation shares in the joy of salvation: "Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth! Break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones" (49:13).

Zechariah, looking to the day of the Lord, invites the people to acclaim the king who comes "humble and riding on a donkey": "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he" (9:9).

Perhaps the most exciting invitation is that of the prophet Zephaniah, who presents God with his people in the midst of a celebration overflowing with the joy of salvation. I find it thrilling to reread this text: "The Lord, your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives you the victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing, as on a day of festival" (3:17).

This is the joy which we experience daily, amid the little things of life, as a response to the loving invitation of God our Father: "My child, treat yourself well, according to your means... Do not deprive yourself of the day's enjoyment" (*Sir*14:11, 14). What tender paternal love echoes in these words!

5. The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ's cross, constantly invites us to rejoice. A few examples will suffice. "Rejoice!" is the angel's greeting to Mary (*Lk* 1:28). Mary's visit to Elizabeth makes John leap for joy in his mother's womb (cf. *Lk* 1:41). In her song of praise, Mary proclaims: "My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour" (*Lk* 1:47). When Jesus begins his ministry, John cries out: "For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled" (*Jn* 3:29). Jesus himself "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" (*Lk* 10:21). His message brings us joy: "I have said these things to you, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (*Jn* 15:11). Our Christian joy drinks of the wellspring of his brimming heart. He promises his disciples: "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy" (*Jn* 16:20). He then goes on to say: "But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (*Jn* 16:22). The disciples "rejoiced" (*Jn* 20:20) at the sight of the risen Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the first Christians "ate their food with glad and generous hearts" (2:46). Wherever the disciples went, "there was great joy" (8:8); even amid persecution they continued to be "filled with joy" (13:52). The newly baptized eunuch "went on his way rejoicing" (8:39), while Paul's jailer "and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God"

(16:34). Why should we not also enter into this great stream of joy?

6. There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved. I understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress: "My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is... But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness... It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (*Lam* 3:17, 21-23, 26).

7. Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met. To some extent this is because our "technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy".^[2] I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith. In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ. I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction".^[3]

8. Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?

II. The delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing

9. Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us, and any person who has

experienced a profound liberation becomes more sensitive to the needs of others. As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good. In this regard, several sayings of Saint Paul will not surprise us: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14); "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).

10. The Gospel offers us the chance to live life on a higher plane, but with no less intensity: "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".^[4] When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfilment. For "here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means".^[5] Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! Let us recover and deepen our enthusiasm, that "delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing, even when it is in tears that we must sow... And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the good news not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ".^[6]

Eternal newness

11. A renewal of preaching can offer believers, as well as the lukewarm and the non-practising, new joy in the faith and fruitfulness in the work of evangelization. The heart of its message will always be the same: the God who revealed his immense love in the crucified and risen Christ. God constantly renews his faithful ones, whatever their age: "They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not be faint" (Is 40:31). Christ is the "eternal Gospel" (Rev 14:6); he "is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8), yet his riches and beauty are inexhaustible. He is for ever young and a constant source of newness. The Church never fails to be amazed at "the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom 11:33). Saint John of the Cross says that "the thicket of God's wisdom and knowledge is so deep and so broad that the soul, however much it has come to know of it, can always penetrate deeper within it".^[7] Or as Saint Irenaeus writes: "By his coming, Christ brought with him all newness".^[8] With this newness he is always able to renew our lives and our communities, and even if the Christian message has known periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness, it will never grow old. Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the

source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always "new".

12. Though it is true that this mission demands great generosity on our part, it would be wrong to see it as a heroic individual undertaking, for it is first and foremost the Lord's work, surpassing anything which we can see and understand. Jesus is "the first and greatest evangelizer".^[9] In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit. The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways. The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that "he has loved us first" (1 Jn 4:19) and that he alone "gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:7). This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us.

13. Nor should we see the newness of this mission as entailing a kind of displacement or forgetfulness of the living history which surrounds us and carries us forward. Memory is a dimension of our faith which we might call "deuteronomic", not unlike the memory of Israel itself. Jesus leaves us the Eucharist as the Church's daily remembrance of, and deeper sharing in, the event of his Passover (cf. Lk 22:19). The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance: it is a grace which we constantly need to implore. The apostles never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts: "It was about four o'clock in the afternoon" (Jn 1:39). Together with Jesus, this remembrance makes present to us "a great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1), some of whom, as believers, we recall with great joy: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God" (Heb 13:7). Some of them were ordinary people who were close to us and introduced us to the life of faith: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice" (2 Tim 1:5). The believer is essentially "one who remembers".

III. The new evangelization for the transmission of the faith

14. Attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit who helps us together to read the signs of the times, the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops gathered from 7-28 October 2012 to discuss the theme: The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith. The Synod reaffirmed that the new

evangelization is a summons addressed to all and that it is carried out in three principal settings.[10]

15. In first place, we can mention the area of *ordinary pastoral ministry*, which is “animated by the fire of the Spirit, so as to inflame 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”.[11] In this category we can also include those members of faithful who preserve a deep and sincere faith, expressing it in different ways, but seldom taking part in worship. Ordinary pastoral ministry seeks to help believers to grow spiritually so that they can respond to God’s love ever more fully in their lives.

A second area is that of “*the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism*”,[12] who lack a meaningful relationship to the Church and no longer experience the consolation born of faith. The Church, in her maternal concern, tries to help them experience a conversion which will restore the joy of faith to their hearts and inspire a commitment to the Gospel.

Lastly, we cannot forget that evangelization is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel to *those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him*. Many of them are quietly seeking God, led by a yearning to see his face, even in countries of ancient Christian tradition. All of them have a right to receive the Gospel. Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but “by attraction”.[13]

John Paul II asked us to recognize that “there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel” to those who are far from Christ, “because this is the first task of the Church”.[14] Indeed, “today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church”[15] and “the missionary task must remain foremost”.[16] What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity*. Along these lines the Latin American bishops stated that we “cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings”;^[17] we need to move “from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry”.[18] This task continues to be a source of immense joy for the Church: “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Lk 15:7).

The scope and limits of this Exhortation

16. I was happy to take up the request of the Fathers of the Synod to write this Exhortation.[19] In so doing, I am reaping the rich fruits of the Synod’s labours. In

addition, I have sought advice from a number of people and I intend to express my own concerns about this particular chapter of the Church's work of evangelization. Countless issues involving evangelization today might be discussed here, but I have chosen not to explore these many questions which call for further reflection and study. Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound "decentralization".

17. Here I have chosen to present some guidelines which can encourage and guide the whole Church in a new phase of evangelization, one marked by enthusiasm and vitality. In this context, and on the basis of the teaching of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, I have decided, among other themes, to discuss at length the following questions:

- a) the reform of the Church in her missionary outreach;
- b) the temptations faced by pastoral workers;
- c) the Church, understood as the entire People of God which evangelizes;
- d) the homily and its preparation;
- e) the inclusion of the poor in society;
- f) peace and dialogue within society;
- g) the spiritual motivations for mission.

18. I have dealt extensively with these topics, with a detail which some may find excessive. But I have done so, not with the intention of providing an exhaustive treatise but simply as a way of showing their important practical implications for the Church's mission today. All of them help give shape to a definite style of evangelization which I ask you to adopt *in every activity which you undertake*. In this way, we can take up, amid our daily efforts, the biblical exhortation: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say: Rejoice" (*Phil 4:4*).