

THE CALL TO HOLINESS IN TODAY'S WORLD

In offering you this evening these comments on Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation 'Rejoice and Be Glad: on the Call to Holiness in Today's World'¹, I am doing so experiencing some anxiety. The subject of this exhortation is holiness. Who is so holy as to feel they can address that subject without fear of being insincere or hypocritical?

My anxiety is somewhat lessened by assuring you that I am no example of the document's theme of holiness and that it is the document I am concerned with. Moreover, my purpose is not to offer a conclusive, compelling interpretation of the document. Rather, I would like to stimulate interest in it; to encourage people to read it and reflect on how Pope Francis' encouragement can inspire their lives.

Can I be sure that what I say will help people in that way? No; but I feel my hope expresses a maxim of St Augustine to which Pope Francis makes reference in the document:

*'God commands you to do what you can and to ask for what you cannot.'*²

Following some introductory comments about the document, I want to pay attention to the importance Pope Francis gives to the examples of the saints. Then I shall set out characteristics of holiness that are named in this document. I will then focus on two guidelines that Pope Francis highlights as central to living the call to holiness in the modern world. After noting the mention of two errors that can frustrate the call to holiness, I will conclude what I can usefully say.

'Rejoice and Be Glad' is an apostolic exhortation. A glance at the Holy See's website³ will show that an apostolic exhortation is one of different types of papal document: Apostolic Constitutions, Apostolic Letters, Encyclicals, Motu Proprios and so forth. An apostolic exhortation encourages a community (here the whole Church) to undertake a particular activity or encourages a disposition of life, but it does not define Church doctrine.

'Rejoice and Be Glad' is not the only apostolic exhortation that Pope Francis has issued and the other two, 'The Joy of the Gospel' (2013)

¹ 19 March 2018

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³ <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>

and 'The Joy of Love' (2016) are well-known. 'Rejoice and Be Glad' can be considered, then, as one of 5 important documents associated with the present pope; the other two being the encyclicals, 'The Light of Faith' (2013 and partly authored with Pope Benedict XVI) and 'Laudato si' (2015).

There may be a tendency to believe that authoritative religious texts will cover or, at least, allude to the same narrow concerns, particularly if they emanate from the same person in virtue of their office. That isn't true in the case of the document we are considering this evening. I want to focus, for a moment, on the terms 'holiness' and 'holy', but I will exclude the encyclical 'Lumen Fidei' from this attention.

The term 'holiness'. In 'Laudato si', the term is not used at all in the main text. In 'The Joy of Love', the term is used twice in the main text within quotations. In 'The Joy of the Gospel' this term is mentioned 3 times in the main text in quotations from Pope Saint John Paul II.

Unsurprisingly, in 'Rejoice and Be Glad' the word 'holiness' is used 80 times. If we discount quotations, it is used 60 times. Perhaps we can conclude from this that Pope Francis is reflecting on something he has not addressed before; that he is, then, writing about something important enough for focussed reflection on the part of all of us; and that he is writing from the basis of personal experience.

The pope's use of the term 'holy' in the 4 documents already referred to is less prominent. In 'The Joy of the Gospel' the term appears 59 times, 49 of these uses in reference to the Holy Spirit, and of the remaining 10 uses only once of persons. In 'Laudato si' there are several uses of the term, but only one of these in reference to ecological conversion as a way for persons to become holy. In 'The Joy of Love' 'holy' is used only as an adjective, as in Holy Spirit, Holy Family, Holy Land or Holy Communion and once in a quotation from the Second Book of Maccabees.

Without wishing to appear to criticise and previous popes who have offered us thoughtful theological reflection, it is evident that Pope Francis' writings are marked by encouragement and practicality. Of 'Rejoice and Be Glad' he says it is not a treatise with definitions to aid understanding the subject of holiness or a discussion of the means of sanctification. It is a re-proposing of the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time. Its basis is the belief that the Lord has chosen

each every one of us 'to be holy and blameless before him in love.'⁴
(Eph 1:4)

The pope does not decry theological study, however. In a letter of 2015 to the Catholic University of Argentina he wrote:

'You learn so as to live: theology and holiness are inseparable' drawing on two Franciscans, St Francis himself and St Bonaventure to support the attitude expressed in that letter.

In terms of re-proposing holiness in a practical way, it isn't, then, surprising to find many saints and blessed making their appearance in the text of 'Rejoice and Be Glad' – no fewer than 46. If we disregard those who are there because of their teaching (notably St Paul), which may be unfair, roughly half of those left are women (19 out of 42). Most of the saints included you will certainly have heard of, but there are some of whom and of whose lives you might not have heard. One of these is Josephine Bakhita. Born in Sudan in 1869, she died in Italy in 1947 and was canonised in 2000. Around the age of 8 she was kidnapped by slave traders and during the following 12 years was bought and sold in Sudanese slave markets to owners whose treatment of her varied from fair to cruel. In 1883, she was bought by an Italian and travelled to Italy where, after some years and at the insistence of the Canossian Sisters with whom she had been living, the Italian courts declared her a free person. Baptised in 1890, she entered the novitiate of the Canossian Sisters and pronounced her final vows in 1896. For another 50 years she lived as a member of the Canossian congregation in the humble services of cooking, sewing and attending to the door.

Blessed Maria Gabriella Sagheddu was Italian. Born into a shepherd family in Sardinia in 1914, she died in 1939 in Rome. She was beatified in 1983. Said to be a difficult, obstinate and lazy child, her childhood was blighted by the death of her father, 3 brothers and a sister. Of limited education she was, however, alert and intelligent and while a teenager undertook the teaching of catechism, in due course accepting the advice of the parish priest that it was probably better not to teach catechism armed with a stick. As a member of Catholic Action, she expanded her ministry to include helping the aged, simultaneously developing a deeper prayer life. When she was 21, she chose to give her life to God as a nun and entered a Trappist monastery in Rome. Her superior was an enthusiastic supporter of ecumenism and Maria also became a supporter of the cause of Christian unity. During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 1938, she offered herself to God as a

⁴ #2

spiritual sacrifice for the unification of the Christian Church. Almost immediately, she developed tuberculosis. She died on 23 April 1939.

It is a reasonable observation that both these women were Catholic religious. Indeed.

That is why I want to quote here, in full, paragraph 14 of 'Rejoice and Be Glad':

'To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. 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.'⁵

I like, then, particularly that early in this document the pope writes of the saints next door and refers to the middle class of holiness.⁶ He writes, also, of the great cloud of witnesses who constantly encourage us to advance to the goal of holiness, who may include our mothers, grandmothers (in his case, certainly) and other loved ones.

Also encouraging is his recognition that their lives and the lives of the saints may not always have been perfect, but that amid their failings they kept moving forward.⁷

The importance of these ordinary settings underlines that truth that no one is saved alone, which is emphasised here by words spoken by Pope Benedict XVI at the Solemn Inauguration of his Petrine Ministry:

'Surrounded, led and guided by the friends of God.... I do not carry alone what, in truth, I could never carry alone. All the saints of God are there to protect me, to sustain me and to carry me.'

⁵ #14

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Only the saints? We are fed and inspired by the signs of holiness found in our neighbours, by the signs of holiness shown by the humblest members of the community who, in the words of the Second Vatican Council:

‘... share also in Christ’s prophetic office, spreading abroad a living witness to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity.’⁸

These witnesses are not found only in the Catholic Church. Holiness is, for Pope Francis, the most attractive face of the Church. Holiness is not, evidently, restricted to the Catholic Church. The pope goes on:

‘..outside the Catholic Church and in very different contexts, the Holy Spirit raises up “signs of his presence which help Christ’s followers”. Saint John Paul II reminded us that “the witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants”. In the moving ecumenical commemoration held in the Colosseum during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, he stated that the martyrs are “a heritage which speaks more powerfully than all the causes of division”.’⁹

To avoid elitism, we do well to remember that the most decisive points in world history are substantially co-determined by people whom no history book ever mentions.¹⁰ We also do well to remember Saint John Paul II’s warning about the temptation on the part of those in the Church who are more highly educated “to feel somehow superior to other members of the faithful”.¹¹

More than once, Pope Francis stresses that God addresses the call to holiness to each one of us, not just to an elite. However, the pope wants us to be reflective in this matter. A list of the more than 40 saints named in the document makes up a list that is anything but uniform. In considering the lives of those saints some examples may be helpful and inspiring, but they are not meant to be copied. Unreflectively trying to imitate examples of sanctity, the pope points out, could lead us astray from the one specific path the Lord has in mind for us. Were we to become discouraged before examples of holiness that seem unattainable the pope would certainly be concerned.

‘The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most

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¹¹ #45

personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts (cf. *1 Cor 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.¹²

As support for this view, the pope calls on Saint John of the Cross, pointing out that in writing his *Spiritual Canticle* that great saint preferred to avoid hard and fast rules as God's life is communicated 'to some in one way and to others in another'.¹³

Thus, as one example of the diversity of holiness Pope Francis highlights feminine styles of holiness as essential means of reflecting the holiness of God in the world. It is not surprising that the pope mentions such saints as Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila and Therese of Lisieux. Once again, though, as if to reiterate what he has previously said about unpublicised holiness, he adds:

'But I think too of all those unknown or forgotten women who, each in her own way, sustained and transformed families and communities by the power of their witness.'¹⁴

Are there characteristics of holiness this document highlights that might help us to reflect about what our particular call to holiness might be?

Well, I can mention some:

- Holiness is, fundamentally a gift, a gift from the Holy Spirit.
- Holiness is not accomplished in a once and for all transformation; it demands daily perseverance and patience
- In growing in holiness, we live out the grace of our Baptism
- Growth in holiness is fostered by living as a member of the Church, for in the Church we will find everything we need to grow in holiness
- Holiness involves engagement with the world in which we live, not immunity from its pressures and demands
- Anything and everything is potentially a path to holiness and even the smallest gestures matter
- A way of life that induces half-heartedness in seeking holiness is not our path
- Nor is any choice of a way of life driven by anxiety, pride or the need to impress others likely to be our path to holiness

¹² #11

¹³ *Spiritual Canticle*. Prologue.

¹⁴ #12

It is helpful to know these signs, but I have been more struck by what Pope Francis puts forward as the unifying meaning of these facets of holiness. The unifying meaning is mission; but what is the mission?

The unifying purpose is mission. Every saint is a mission, planned by the Lord to embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel. For every Christian, indeed, the path to holiness is a mission. That mission, in essence, an experience in union with Christ of the mysteries of his life. It consists in reproducing various aspects of Jesus' earthly life in our own lives; in particular, uniting ourselves to his death and resurrection by constantly dying and rising anew with him.¹⁵

In the end, it is Christ who loves in us for, as Pope Benedict XVI observed, holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full. The same pope also said:

“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”

We can look to the saints for inspiration, but as inspiration only; every saint being a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people.¹⁶

Pope Francis' view of the saints is clearly respectful but measured. They can provide some inspiration as we grow in our mission:

To recognize the word that the Lord wishes to speak to us through one of his saints, we do not need to get caught up in details, for there we might also encounter mistakes and failures. Not everything a saint says is completely faithful to the Gospel; not everything he or she does is authentic or perfect. What we need to contemplate is 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.¹⁷

Our mission, however, is unique. We need to allow the Spirit to forge in us the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today's world by listening to God in prayer and by recognising the signs he gives us. In prayer and usually with the help of the community of the Church and the help of prayerful communities within it, we must ask the Spirit what

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¹⁶ #21

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Jesus expects from us at every moment of our lives and in every decision we must make, so as to discern the place of that decision in the mission we have received.¹⁸

It is patently the pope's own prayerful wish that every one of us may come to realise what that personal word of mission is for us. That word will be overt. For, as Pope Francis points out, just as we cannot understand Christ apart from the kingdom he came to bring, our personal mission is inseparable from building that kingdom. Our identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace.¹⁹

All this may sound a bit overwhelming. However, the confidence of the pope and his confidence in his readers in the face of these challenges is undaunted. 'Do not', he writes,

'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. To depend on God sets us free from every form of enslavement and leads us to recognize our great dignity.'²⁰

and further

'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.'

Our mission, then, is the mission of reproducing in our lives, in a unique way, various aspects of Jesus' earthly life. Does Pope Francis offer any resources on which we can draw to guide the unfolding of our mission. In Chapter 3 of 'Rejoice and Be Glad' the pope presents reflections on the Beatitudes, drawing on St Matthew and St Luke, as well as on the last sixteen verses of Chapter 25 in St Matthew, the Judgment of the Nations, which the pope names The Great Criterion.

In reflecting on the Beatitudes, the pope is not focussing on their theological message. His intention, set out in the introduction, is to reflect in a practical way on the call to holiness in our own times and to help us reproduce in our own days and in our own lives, in union with Jesus, various aspects of his earthly life. This may require allowing his

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¹⁹ #25

²⁰ #32

words to unsettle us, to challenge us and to demand a real change in the way we live.²¹

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’ invites us to peer with genuine integrity into the depths of our hearts and honestly acknowledge where we find our security in life.

‘Blessed are the meek.’ Jesus proposes a different way than that of every person thinking they have the right to dominate others. Meekness is a way in which those who put their trust in God express themselves. If we regard the faults of others with tenderness and meekness, without an air of superiority, we can actually help them and stop wasting our energy on useless complaining.

‘Blessed are those who mourn.’ A person who sees things as they truly are, Pope Francis writes, and sympathises with pain and sorrow is capable of touching life’s depths and of finding authentic happiness.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.’ Jesus offers a justice other than that of the world, so often marred by petty interests and manipulated in so many ways. True justice comes about in people’s lives when they themselves are just in their decisions. It is expressed in their pursuit of justice for the poor and the weak.

‘Blessed are the merciful.’ It is a considerable help, the pope believes, if we think of ourselves as an army of the forgiven. This will be a help not just to fulfilling the first aspect of mercy in our helping and serving others, but also the second aspect of mercy expressed in forgiveness and understanding. Such awareness of our own standing before God will enable us to apply more easily St Matthew’s golden rule of ‘do to others as you would have them do to you’ (Mt 7:12); which, indeed, the Catechism²² reminds us is a law to be applied in every case, especially in situations that make moral judgments less assured and a decision more difficult.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart.’ The Bible uses ‘the heart’ to describe our real intentions, the things we truly seek and desire, apart from all appearances. Certainly, there can be no love without words of love, but this Beatitude reminds us that the Lord expects a commitment to our sisters and brothers that does come from the heart. A heart really

²¹ #66

²² Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1789

capable of love admits nothing that might harm weaken or endanger that love.

Blessed are the peacemakers. In his comment on this Beatitude, Pope Francis asks us to reflect on whether we ourselves are not often the cause of conflict or at least of misunderstanding. Gossip is what the pope is referring to here, pointing out that the world of gossip, inhabited by negative and destructive people, does not bring peace. Peacemakers, on the other hand, make peace. They build peace and friendship in society. Sowing peace all around us, that is holiness.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.’ Living the Gospel is not easy; the thirst for power and worldly interests often stand in the way. People of faith are or should be a threat to these interests. For that reason, persecution can often take the form of gibes that caricature our faith and make us seem ridiculous, gibes we must bear without resorting to responses that intend to secure the upper hand.

What, then, of the Great Criterion that the pope offers with the Beatitudes as a second guideline to help us advance to holiness?

What the pope means by the Great Criterion is the part of Chapter 25 of St Matthew’s Gospel he says expands on the Beatitude that calls the merciful blessed.

‘I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me to drink....’

In this setting, holiness is not, writes the pope, about swooning in mystical rapture.²³ Quoting Pope Saint John Paul II, Pope Francis goes on to insist we must learn to see Jesus in the face of those with whom he himself wishes to be identified. In this call to recognise him in the poor and suffering, we not only see Jesus’ deepest feelings, we see his ‘heart’ and the choices Jesus made, the choices that every saint seeks to imitate.

Then the pope goes on

‘Given these uncompromising demands of Jesus, it is my duty to ask Christians to acknowledge and accept them in a spirit of genuine openness, *sine glossa*. In other words, without any “ifs or buts” that could lessen their force. Our Lord made it very clear that

²³ #96

holiness cannot be understood or lived apart from these demands, for mercy is “the beating heart of the Gospel”²⁴

It must be clear, then, that holiness cannot be understood apart from the recognition of the dignity of every human being, a path to holiness that may we involve constant and healthy unease.

Unease can readily open a path not to holiness but to avoidance and the pope warns against two possible pitfalls.

The first of these makes of Gospel demands (and, therefore, of holiness) an abstract reality, moral principles understood only by the select few and devoid of any personal relationship with Jesus. Such people might well be unaware of Pope Saint John Paul II’s warning about the temptation for some ‘to feel somehow superior to other members of the faithful.’

The other attitude is to relativize the social engagements of other Christians (indeed, Catholics), regarding them as secular and, instead, proposing one particular moral issue as the only thing that counts. The pope exemplifies this attitude by writing that though defence of the innocent unborn must be clear, firm and passionate, equally sacred are the lives of the poor, the already born, the destitute, the vulnerable, the infirm and elderly and migrants.

Indeed, for Pope Francis the best way to judge if prayer is authentic is to judge to what extent our lives are being transformed in the light of mercy.²⁵ Furthermore, we will find it hard to feel and show any real concern for those in need unless we cultivate a certain simplicity of life and resist the feverish demands of a consumer society.²⁶

Earlier in the document, the pope highlighted in a whole chapter, Chapter Two, what he calls two subtle enemies of holiness. Permit me to deal with them rather briefly. These antagonists of holiness are usually disguised forms of heresies that have repeatedly recurred in Church life. The pope names these ‘two subtle enemies of holiness’ in Chapter Two of ‘Rejoice and Be Glad’ as Gnosticism and Pelagianism.

The first of these errors overestimates the value of the intellect. The Church has, however, always been clear that a person’s perfection is

²⁴ #97
²⁵ #105
²⁶ #108

measured not by their knowledge but by the depth of their charity. This attitude embodies a belief that the entirety of faith and the Gospel can be made perfectly comprehensible. But, writes the pope, when somebody has an answer for every question, it is clear they are not on the right road.²⁷ It suggests these are people who might prefer a God without Jesus, Jesus without the Church, the Church without her people. Yet God is mysteriously present in every person's life and we cannot exclude this truth by our presumed certainties.

Now just as knowledge doesn't make us better nor saints, neither does personal effort, which is a faulty judgment of those who overestimate the human will. There are some, the pope suggests, who speak warmly of God's grace, but ultimately trust in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules and remain unbendingly faithful to a particular style. This viewpoint does not tolerate weakness. Yet not prayerfully to acknowledge our limitations prevents grace from working more effectively and so deprives us of the opportunity to take the real and possible steps of growth the Lord asks of us. The harvest reaped by such an emphasis on personal effort is likely to be a self-centred and elitist complacency lacking in true love.

It is in his awareness of errors and pitfalls such as these that, in the last chapter of the document, Pope Francis highlights the need for vigilance and discernment.

We need strength and courage as we strive to live Christian lives and it is not just a struggle against worldliness and human weakness. We struggle against real evil.²⁸ This is what makes neutrality and lethargy in our faith lives so dangerous, leading to a spiritual corruption where 'anything goes' or, as the pope writes

'Complacency is seductive; it tells us that there is no point in trying to change things, that there is nothing we can do, because this is the way things have always been and yet we always manage to survive. By force of habit we no longer stand up to evil. We "let things be", or as others have decided they ought to be.'²⁹

It is a mistake both to underestimate this struggle and to undervalue the means we have to overcome evil: prayer, meditation on the Scriptures, Mass, Eucharistic adoration, Confession, and works of charity.

²⁷ #41

²⁸ ##56, 159

²⁹ #137

What the pope chooses to highlight, however, is that discernment that calls for something more than intelligence and common sense and which, he says is an urgent need without which we become prey to every passing trend.³⁰

An assurance of solid discernment is found in 5 marks being present.³¹ Firstly, that discernment is a continuous stance, not used only at extraordinary times (grave problems, crucial decisions), but as an abiding means to help one follow the Lord faithfully and to show greatness of spirit in simple, everyday realities.

Secondly, the acknowledgment that discernment is a grace. It may include psychological and other insights, but it goes beyond them. Not even the Church's sound norms are sufficient because what we are talking about here is glimpsing that mysterious plan God has for each of us, the meaning of our lives before God.³²

Discernment is, thirdly, a prayerful activity that enables us to interpret the real meaning of inspirations, that calms our anxieties and that enables us to see the whole of our existence afresh in God's light.

Fourthly, it is not, therefore, a matter of applying rules or of repeating what was done in the past. Discernment liberates us from a rigidity that has no place in the 'today' of the Risen Jesus.

Finally, discernment is not about getting more out of life. It is the means by which we recognise how we can better accomplish the mission of holiness entrusted to us at baptism. An essential condition for progress in discernment is a growing understanding of God's patience and his timetable, which are never our own. This entails, as the pope writes

a readiness to make sacrifices, even to sacrificing everything.....

When, in God's presence, we examine our life's journey, no areas can be off limits. In all aspects of life we can continue to grow and offer something greater to God, even in those areas we find most difficult. We need, though, to ask the Holy Spirit to liberate us and to expel the fear that makes us ban him from certain parts of our lives.³³

³⁰ #167

³¹ ##169-175

³² #170

³³ ##174-175

As I noted earlier, the pope has great confidence in his readers, encouraging us not to be afraid of holiness and to set our sights high. He encourages us by setting out in Chapter Four of 'Rejoice and Be Glad' what he considers 5 signs or spiritual attitudes, which by their presence, will be indicators that we are in the way of life in which God is calling us.

The first of these is signs of perseverance, patience and meekness. These are all underpinned by a solid rootedness in the God who loves and sustains us. Without these qualities, we won't be able to give a witness to holiness in a fast-paced, noisy and aggressive world.

The second sign is to be found in joy and a sense of humour. Saints are joyful, the pope points out. Though completely realistic, they radiate a positive and hopeful spirit. Indeed, sadness can be a sign of ingratitude for the life given us, a sadness that is caused by being so caught up in ourselves that we fail to recognise God's gift.

Boldness and passion is the third mark of God's calling. Too often we are tempted to keep close to the shore. Jesus was by no means hesitant, timid and self-conscious. He was certainly not in the mould of the prophet Jonah, looking for a safe haven that today might take a number of forms: addiction, individualism, intransigence, dogmatism, nostalgia or rules and regulations. The contrary of these things would be a strong desire to evangelise and by this means to leave a mark on the world. We are moved to do this when, as the pope writes:

'We are inspired to act by the example of all those 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.'³⁴

We must, writes the pope:

'ask for the apostolic courage to share the Gospel with others and to stop trying to make our Christian life a museum of memories.'³⁵

Then, there is community for growth in holiness is a journey side by side with others. This shared life is made of small, everyday things. The

³⁴ #138

³⁵ #139

pope underlines this aspect of holiness by drawing attention to the number of times that Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details: that wine was running out at a party; that one sheep was missing; of noticing the widow who offered her small coins, and so forth. Cherishing these little details of love creates an open and evangelising environment where the Risen Jesus is present, sanctifying that environment in accordance with God's plan.³⁶

The fifth sign of holiness is the evidence of constant prayer. There is no holiness without prayer. He states, simply:

'I do not believe in holiness without prayer, even though that prayer need not be lengthy or involve intense emotions.'³⁷

It is Carmelites he cites as expressing similar views. First St John of the Cross, who wrote in his 'Counsels to a Religious on How to Attain Perfection':

'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'

This is not to discount silence as a setting for prayer. The other Carmelite the pope relies on is Saint Teresa of Avila for whom prayer was:

'nothing but friendly intercourse, and frequent solitary converse, with him who we know loves us.'

Which the pope underlines by quoting his predecessor Pope Saint John Paul II:

'we all have need of this silence, filled with the presence of him who is adored.'³⁸

There is not substitute for reading the original text of 'Rejoice and Be Glad'. There are many printed versions. To be left now or at the end of reading the text with the notion that holiness is something special for special people would be a terrible mistake. It may seem amazing, knowing ourselves, our failings and our hidden faults, our meanness and our self-regard that God would want to call us to live in this reality with something of the love with which we are loved out of the mercy that is divine.

³⁶ #145

³⁷ #147

³⁸ Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen* (2 May 1995), 16: AAS 87 (1995), 762

Yet, it is so and the saints knew it and confidently answered that call. At one point, the pope quotes Saint Teresa of Kolkata and I feel it is the quotation with which to end. She wrote:

‘Yes, I have many human faults and failures... But God bends down and uses us, you and me, to be his love and his compassion in the world; he bears our sins, our troubles and our faults. He depends on us to love the world and to show how much he loves it. If we are too concerned with ourselves, we will have no time left for others’³⁹

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³⁹ #107. *Cristo en los Pobres*, Madrid, 1981, 37-38.