

Pope Francis and the Renewal of Catholicism

St. Mary's Catholic Church, Simsbury, CT



Basics about Pope Francis' first major document:

- Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*
- English title: "The Joy of the Gospel"
- Completed November 2013
- An "Apostolic Exhortation" is a pastoral papal document, often written in response to a Synod of Bishops, exhorting people to live a certain teaching or deal with a contemporary pastoral challenge in a particular way.
- There was a Synod of Bishops in October 2012 on the "New Evangelization."
- The document can be purchased on amazon.com or found on-line by typing "Evangelii Gaudium" or "Joy of the Gospel" into a search engine such as google. The official version of the document is found on the Vatican website (vatican.va).

What is meant by the "joy of the Gospel" or the "joy of evangelization"?

- The Church is missionary in character. It is about *going out*, not about *turning in*.
- This missionary mandate has both a *community* and a *personal* dimension.
- We have a message to share. That message is essentially *a person* (the Crucified and Risen Christ), with whom we have had an encounter and have been changed.
- This love of God for human beings in the person of Jesus Christ is the *joy of the Gospel*, which we are "impelled" to share with others.
- This message has implications for how we treat one another.

Who needs to be evangelized?

- Those who are actively engaged in the life of the Church.
- Those who are associated with the Church by baptism but no longer find meaning in their faith or the life of the Church.
- Those who do not yet know Christ.

Where do the Church's moral teachings fit in? (EG 34-39)

- The Church's moral teachings are situated in the Gospel message and Jesus' command to love God and one another.
- The heart of the Gospel message – the love of God for human beings in the person of the Crucified and Risen Christ – is primary.
- If this love is not the *focus and foundation*, the Church's moral teachings are without context and are unintelligible and meaningless.
- The Church's missionary character is meant to *engage and attract* the world, not *judge or alienate* the world.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. *How do we evangelize in our contemporary world? How do we “leave security on the shore” and “become excited by the mission of communicating life to others” (EG 10)?*
2. *How do we serve the poor with love and respect? How do we go from talking about it to doing it?*
3. *We need to evangelize those who are already actively involved in the Church, those who are baptized but not living out the call of their baptism, and those who do not know Christ. Which of these do we do well? Which is most challenging? Which is most urgent in our times?*

Closing Prayer

(from EG 3)

Leader: *Pope Francis writes, 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”. 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:*

All: *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.*

Leader: 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....

All: *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! Amen!*