

*Our Life: A Mission in Christ*

Last month we started looking at Pope Francis' new Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 'Rejoice and be glad' – 'On the Call to Holiness in Today's World'.

In the first chapter, the Holy Father reflects upon Christ as our one foundation. Holiness isn't just the accumulation of good deeds, or the development of virtues. Virtues and good works are necessary, but Christian holiness can only be understood as something completely within the context of Christ. We are holy insofar as we live our lives totally in him.

'[Our] mission has its fullest meaning in Christ, and can only be understood through him. At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord's death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him.' (20)

'The Father's plan is Christ, and ourselves in him. In the end, it is Christ who loves in us, for "holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full". As a result, "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".' (21, quoting Pope Benedict XVI)

The Pope says two striking things about what a saint is: 'Every saint is a message which the Holy Spirit takes from the riches of Jesus Christ and gives to his people.' (21) 'Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel.' (19)

And of course, when he's talking about 'each saint', and 'every saint', he's talking about what each one of *us* is meant to be. So he wants to tell us: don't divide up your life. We don't 'have' a message and a mission, as something tacked on to the basic reality of our life. No, he says, 'life does not *have* a mission, but *is* a mission'. (27, quoting Xavier Zubiri)

So that's our calling – not simply to have a message or fulfil a mission, but to 'be' a message and a mission, unique and personal to each one of us, taken from the riches of Christ, to reflect and embody a certain aspect of the Gospel in our specific time and place. That *is* our life. That's what we're here for. And if we don't fulfil our unique God-given mission, no one else is going to do it for us.

And this mission isn't separate from our call to holiness. The Holy Father writes: 'A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness, for "this is the will of God, your sanctification" (*1 Thess 4:3*)'. Nor do we divide our life – which *is* a mission and a path to holiness – from building Christ's Kingdom. The Pope says: 'Just as you cannot understand Christ apart from the kingdom he came to bring, so too your personal mission is inseparable from the building of that kingdom...Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace.' (25)

The path to holiness, he explains, is found both in our contemplation and our action, in the silence of prayer and in engagement with the world around us. We cannot use a desire for

silence and peace as an excuse to flee that service of others that belongs to our personal mission. 'There are times when we are tempted to relegate pastoral engagement or commitment in the world to second place, as if these were "distractions" along the path to growth in holiness and interior peace.' (27)

'Everything can be accepted and integrated into our life in this world, and become a part of our path to holiness. We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission.' (26) This is something we're very familiar with as legionaries: we serve God and become sanctified both when we pray the Rosary in meetings, and also when, empowered by prayer, we engage in works of the apostolate.

'This does not mean ignoring the need for moments of quiet, solitude and silence before God. Quite the contrary. The presence of constantly new gadgets, the excitement of travel and an endless array of consumer goods at times leave no room for God's voice to be heard. We are overwhelmed by words, by superficial pleasures and by an increasing din, filled not by joy but rather by the discontent of those whose lives have lost meaning. How can we fail to realise the need to stop this rat race and to recover the personal space needed to carry on a heartfelt dialogue with God?' (29)

'We need a spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelising efforts, so that every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord's eyes. In this way, every minute of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness.' (31)

'Needless to say, anything done out of anxiety, pride or the need to impress others will not lead to holiness.' (28)

'Do not be afraid of holiness...You will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self.' (32)

'Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God's grace. For in the words of León Bloy, when all is said and done, "the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint".' (34)