

Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



‘Rejoice and Be Glad’

In this joyful Easter Season, as we celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the words “Rejoice and Be Glad” take on deeper meaning as we receive Pope Francis’ new Apostolic Exhortation, “Gaudete et Exsultate; Rejoice and Be Glad: On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World.” Once again, in the simple/ accessible style he’s become known for, the Holy Father offers a practical guide for all people to embrace the call to holiness that the Lord addresses to each of us personally. The Lord “wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence,” the Pope writes.

The Holy Father underlines the Second Vatican Council’s teaching of the universal call to holiness, and at the same time identifies two perennial “subtle enemies” of that holiness, which can “weigh down the Church” and block her progress by seeking salvation not through Christ, but through one’s own ideas or human efforts alone. This progress is marked by key expressions of holiness: perseverance, patience, meekness, joy, humor, boldness, passion, a sense of community, and constant prayer.

Reminding the faithful that “Christianity is meant above all to be put into practice,” Pope Francis provides direct and concrete examples on how this can be done by highlighting what he calls the “Christian’s identity card,” the Beatitudes found in the Gospels (Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23). Living an authentic Christian life means being engaged in a spiritual combat requiring vigilance and discernment. Pope Francis affirms: “We need strength and courage to withstand the temptations of the devil and to proclaim the Gospel.”

Once again, however, reports in the media have been a source of confusion for the faithful. Just recently, we read reports that in

a private meeting, Pope Francis told an atheist with whom he was visiting that there is no hell. Then we were told that the Vatican Press Office had clarified that in fact the Pope had not granted an interview, that there was a conversation between friends, but that the Holy Father never in fact said what was reported.

Yet again, with this document, media reports have already zoomed in on one or two paragraphs, taking words out of context and claiming the Pope said something he didn’t say. For example, representing that the Pope puts caring for migrants and opposing abortion on equal footing. When what the Pope actually wrote was this, placing the defense of the unborn first in the list of respect for each and every human life:

“Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection.”

The context of what the Pope actually wrote is in response to an ideological error which strikes at the heart of the Gospel: when folks believe that the only thing that counts is their one particular issue. The Holy Father actually affirmed the sacredness of each and every human life, highlighting first and foremost, even by its placement in the paragraph, the unborn.

My dear Dad used to say “Believe none of what you hear and half of what you read.” I mention this firstly as a caution to the faithful:

we cannot allow media reports to be our sole sources if we are to be informed Catholics. I can’t tell you how often people admit to me they have formed an opinion though they have never read the original text of a document being discussed. And I mention this secondly as an encouragement to read the actual document, to engage what the Holy Father actually wrote, and to consider what is actually written in its proper context. Sadly, as we have discovered, no institution or outlet or person is immune from “Fake News.” In fact, the Pope himself addressed the issue of “fake news” in his January 24, 2018 Message for World Communications Day!

“Rejoice and Be Glad!” We rejoice that the mission and vision of the Diocese of Toledo to foster holy disciples, holy families, and holy vocations is renewed and confirmed in this new Apostolic Exhortation. I invite all Catholics and all people of good will to embrace Pope Francis’ call with the intent of striving more fervently to grow in holiness in our ordinary daily lives.

+ Daniel E. Thomas

Most Rev. Daniel E. Thomas
Bishop of Toledo
April 10, 2018

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