

# St. Katharine Drexel Region Online Book Club

## Session 1

### *Evangelii Gaudium 1-3*

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.*

**[Rule, 13]** A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

**[Rule, 19]** Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.

**[Constitution, 26.1]** Even in suffering, Francis experienced confidence and joy from:

- the experience of the fatherhood of God;
- the invincible faith of rising with Christ to eternal life;
- the experience of being able to meet and praise the Creator in the universal fraternity of all creatures.

Following the Gospel, secular Franciscans therefore affirm their hope and their joy in living. They make a contribution to counter widespread distress and pessimism, preparing a better future.

**[Lino]** Evangelizing, however, does not mean only proclaiming the Gospel, but also living it. The Gospel is the epiphany of Jesus Christ, his manifestation. Living the Gospel, therefore, is to live Christ. Evangelizing is, therefore, living Christ and while living, proclaiming it and making it present through our persons, our holy lives in every corner of the earth. Our Rule is a relentless succession of exhortations to live the gospel, that is, to live Christ. The new evangelization (which is not new, but the same as always but one which has to be enfolded, not in the abstract of academic formulas, but in the concrete conditions of the world – saeculum - importance of seculars!) can be realized only through the deep and credible conversion of each Christian, each one of us.

**[Lino]** Francis is a privileged icon of evangelization for the whole Church. He, a man of the 13th century was credible for the men of his century and being firmly anchored in Christ, remains credible at all times, even today, for Jesus

Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). Let's imagine what would the Church be today if all of us, who are following Christ as Francis did, were able to accomplish in ourselves – with the help of Grace – what Francis realized with his personal conversion!

## ***1. 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.***

**[Constitution, 15.3]** Secular Franciscans should pledge themselves to reduce their own personal needs so as to be better able to share spiritual and material goods with their brothers and sisters, especially those most in need. They should give thanks to God for the goods they have received, using them as good stewards and not as owners. They should take a firm position against consumerism and against ideologies and practices which prefer riches over human and religious values and which permit the exploitation of the human person.

**[Higgins]** The rule of life speaks of Family life and of respect for life-major concerns of all of us. We have seen family life fragment with divorce, so often traceable to secular currents rampant in our society. Selfishness, consumerism, materialism, hedonism run amuck in the world today. The Secular Franciscan promises before God and the world that he or she will endeavor to give herself or himself in service to others, to live simply according to the Gospel, to be a person of penance, giving up that which is merely pleasurable for the sake of the kingdom.

**[Stafford]** The material things we surround ourselves with can be powerful signs of an unclean, disorder soul, and of misdirected desire. In a world awash in the cheap consumerism of the Cult of the Self, our possessions and the value we attach to them speak volumes. So, amidst the decadence and waste of modernity, we must live modestly. The cars we drive, the houses we live in, the clothes we wear — all should reflect the humility of spirit that distinguishes those living lives of radical discipleship to Christ. By so doing, we demonstrate our rejection of the mores and lifestyles of the Selfies, and become signs of contradiction that can be emulated by others.

**[Compendium, 150]** The social nature of human beings does not automatically lead to communion among persons, to the gift of self. Because

of pride and selfishness, man discovers in himself the seeds of asocial behaviour, impulses leading him to close himself within his own individuality and to dominate his neighbour. Every society worthy of the name can be sure that it stands in the truth when all of its members, thanks to their ability to know what is good, are able to pursue it for themselves and for others. It is out of love for one's own good and for that of others that people come together in stable groups with the purpose of attaining a common good. The different human societies also must establish among themselves relationships of solidarity, communication and cooperation, in the service of man and the common good.

- 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 unflinchingly 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: "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 unflinching 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!***

**[Rule, Letter of the Four Ministers General of the Franciscan Family]** The hope of renewal hinges upon returning to the origins and to the spiritual experience of Francis of Assisi and of the brothers and sisters of penance who received from him their inspiration and guidance. It is this that accounts for the inclusion of the *Letter to the Faithful (recensio prior)* as a prologue, as well as the constant references to the teaching and example of St. Francis. This renewal also depends upon openness to the Spirit in the signs of the times.

**[Rule, 7]** United by their vocation as "brothers and sisters of penance" and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel calls "conversion." Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily. On this road to renewal the sacrament of

reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace.

**[Constitution, 13.1-2]** Secular Franciscans, called in earlier times "the brothers and sisters of penance", propose to live in the spirit of continual conversion. Some means to cultivate this characteristic of the Franciscan vocation, individually and in fraternity, are: listening to and celebrating the Word of God; review of life; spiritual retreats; the help of a spiritual adviser, and penitential celebrations. They should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently and participate in the communal celebration of it, whether in the fraternity, or with the whole people of God. In this spirit of conversion, they should live out their love for the renewal of the Church, which should be accompanied by personal and communal renewal. The fruits of conversion, which is a response to the love of God, are the works of charity in the interactions with the brothers and sisters.

**[Magee]** The fundamental value of penitential spirituality is integral to the continued development of Franciscan life and spirituality. The penitential life is not a matter of "doing penance" or accomplishing penitential acts, rather it is the openness to grow, to be shaped, and formed in a life that reflects the dynamic movement and presence of Christ within. *Metanoia* is not something we do; it is God's gracious gift. Our participation in *metanoia* depends on our capacity to be receptive, bent low in prayerful and contemplative love, to dwell in Christ, and with Christ live in bountiful love and service to others.

**[Horan]** A Franciscan approach to ministry must always be rooted in a life of lived prayer. Those who adopt a Franciscan approach to ministry are not just people who pray, but people whose whole life serves as a prayer by their words and actions. Lived prayer is the openness to ongoing conversion that allows God to enter one's life and transform it from the preoccupations of worldly concerns and triviality to an expression of authentic Gospel living – following Christ's footsteps and working as God's instrument of peace today.

**[Chaput]** Of course, unless we understand our own sinfulness, unless we understand the urgency of repentance and reconciliation, the Cross makes no sense; the Resurrection makes no sense. Easter joy is the joy of deliverance and new life. If we don't believe in our bones that we really do desperately need these things, Easter is just another excuse for a holiday sale; and the Sacrament of Penance, and our fasting and almsgiving, are a waste of time. But in the silence of our own hearts, if we're honest, we know we hunger for something more than our own selfishness and mistakes. We were made for glory, and we're empty of that glory until God fills us with his presence. All things are made new in the victory of Jesus Christ – even sinners like you and me. The blood of the Cross washes away death. It purifies us as vessels for God's new life. The Resurrection fills us with God's own life.

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