

What Does Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* Reveal about His Role in the Church?

Topic 1

In the introduction to his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis addresses one of the most difficult problems of our times: consumerism with a resultant complacency toward the poor.

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. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2)

Why is Pope Francis concerned with the dangers of consumerism? What does the issue of consumerism have to do with the Catholic faith?

Evangelii Gaudium sets a tone and lays out an agenda for Pope Francis's papacy. In your opinion, what issue or issues are most important to Pope Francis? (Hint: Why did he choose the name "Francis"?)

What does the above excerpt from *Evangelii Gaudium* reveal about the Pope's role in the Church?



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Topic 2

Pope Francis invites all Christians, not only Catholics, to open their hearts once again to Jesus Christ, so that we can know Christ's redeeming and loving embrace of all of humanity.

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."¹ 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 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! (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 3)

Why do you think Pope Francis addresses his invitation to all Christians and not just Catholics?

What does Pope Francis mean when he says, "No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love"?

What does this excerpt reveal about the Pope's role in the Church?

¹ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino* (9 May 1975), 22: AAS 67 (1975), 297.



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Topic 3

Pope Francis invites all Christians to generously respond to the mission of making Christ's love visible, the mission of evangelization.

Though it is true that this mission demands great generosity on our part, it would be wrong to see it as a heroic individual undertaking, for it is first and foremost the Lord's work, surpassing anything which we can see and understand. Jesus is "the first and greatest evangelizer."² In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit. The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways. The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that "he has loved us first" (1 Jn 4:19) and that he alone "gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:7). This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 12)

Why does Pope Francis say that the mission of evangelization (sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ) "demands great generosity on our part," yet is not a "heroic individual undertaking"?

What does Pope Francis mean when he says that Jesus is "the first and greatest evangelizer"?

What does this excerpt reveal about the Pope's role in the Church?

² Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 7: AAS 68 (1976), 9.



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Topic 4

Pope Francis calls us to evangelize with a freshness and newness, while at the same time, reminding us to remember our personal and collective salvation history.

Nor should we see the newness of this mission as entailing a kind of displacement or forgetfulness of the living history which surrounds us and carries us forward. Memory is a dimension of our faith which we might call “deuteronomic,” not unlike the memory of Israel itself. Jesus leaves us the Eucharist as the Church’s daily remembrance of, and deeper sharing in, the event of his Passover (cf. Lk 22:19). The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance: it is a grace which we constantly need to implore. The apostles never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts: “It was about four o’clock in the afternoon” (Jn 1:39). Together with Jesus, this remembrance makes present to us “a great cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1), some of whom, as believers, we recall with great joy: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God” (Heb 13:7). Some of them were ordinary people who were close to us and introduced us to the life of faith: “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice” (2 Tim 1:5). The believer is essentially “one who remembers.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 13)

Why does Pope Francis say that our own “grateful remembrance” is important for us when we share the Good News with others?

Describe two of the specific moments cited by Pope Francis when Christians remembered the moment of being called.

Why does Pope Francis say that the believer is essentially “one who remembers”?

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Topic 5

Pope Francis expresses the mystery of the Church's apostolic mission, saying that it is our responsibility to spread the Gospel with joy. However, preaching the Gospel may have unpredictable results—ones we may be unable to control.

The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy. The seventy-two disciples felt it as they returned from their mission (cf. Lk 10:17). Jesus felt it when he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and praised the Father for revealing himself to the poor and the little ones (cf. Lk 10:21). It was felt by the first converts who marveled to hear the apostles preaching “in the native language of each” (Acts 2:6) on the day of Pentecost. This joy is a sign that the Gospel has been proclaimed and is bearing fruit. Yet the drive to go forth and give, to go out from ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present. The Lord says: “Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (Mk 1:38). Once the seed has been sown in one place, Jesus does not stay behind to explain things or to perform more signs; the Spirit moves him to go forth to other towns. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 21)

God's word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself, even as the farmer sleeps (Mk 4:26–29). The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 22)

What is the significance of the first converts hearing the Gospel message in their native language (Acts 2:6)?

Other than actual speech, what does language include? Do you think that a broader interpretation of “language” is important for sharing the Good News?

What does Pope Francis mean when he describes the “unruly freedom of the word”?

What does this excerpt reveal about the Pope's role in the Church?



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Topic 6

Pope Francis explains that the Gospel is for all people. All must be included with joy, even when it is difficult to reach out to a particular person or group.

The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded. That is what the angel proclaimed to the shepherds in Bethlehem: "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people" (Lk 2:10). The Book of Revelation speaks of "an eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tongue and tribe and people" (Rev 14:6). (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 23)

The Church which "goes forth" is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy. Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved. Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 24)

Why does Pope Francis say that "no one can be excluded" from the joy of the Gospel?

Why does Pope Francis emphasize that it is a "community of missionary disciples" who bring the Good News to all people?

Who are some of the outcasts today that Pope Francis may be thinking of, and why should we stand at the crossroads and welcome them?

What does this excerpt reveal about the Pope's role in the Church?

(The excerpts on this handout are from Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world, *Evangelii Gaudium*, numbers 2, 3, 12, 13, 21, 22, 23, and 24, at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html. Copyright © LEV. Used by permission.)

