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How is it that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who went about doing good, became the stone rejected by the builders? He is gentle and meek, and his teachings were one of Love. It shouldn't be too surprising. Before him, there was John the Baptist, who even Herod was fascinated by, but he ultimately put him to death. John the Baptist is not alone in this. Down the centuries the Hebrew prophets were put to death, and since Christ, saints have also been martyred for the faith. This is because these messengers can be prophetic. They challenge, and we are both fascinated and put off, even though we know there is something right about what they are saying.

Pope Francis has proved to be a fascinating pope, but one whose words people find challenging. This is because he is quite prophetic. He does not just want to challenge, but also to encourage. This is why he wrote his new apostolic exhortation on the universal call to holiness called, *Gaudete et Exultate*, Rejoice and be Glad. It is not so much a teaching document but one in which he exhorts and encourages. Such exhortations come with challenges.

The first challenge he lays out is the reminder that everyone is called to be a saint. He writes,

“To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by laboring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain.”

This is no way makes you boring, for “Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self. To depend on God sets us free from every form of enslavement and leads us to recognize our great dignity.” In fact, each one of us is called to be permanently on mission building up the Kingdom. We are part of God's plan for salvation history. To quote the Blues Brothers, “We are on a mission from God.”

He warns against two things which zap our energy our have us follow a false Christianity. One he labels contemporary Gnosticism, and the other he names as contemporary pelagianism, two modern forms of ancient heresies. The first thinks we are saved by our own knowledge of religion, instead of our love, as the criteria for living Christianity. This turns into an obsession with obscure facts about the history of Christianity, and, if I may so, makes Christians into people who talk about strange things, a turn-off to people seeking the Good News. The second

relies on our own strength to save us. If Christ teaches that all things are possible with his grace, the pelagian thinks that means the person who repents should immediately be free of all bad habits without any further imploring of God for grace. Or thinks that those who keep falling back into sin must be too weak to be saved. Or thinks that, "If I just pray, I can force God to give me consolations." This person relies on Eastern techniques in prayer to experience a psychological peace, instead of doing the hard-work of suffering through the dark nights of sense and spirit. They want to remain in control of their destiny, instead of surrendering to God.

The antidotes he mentions are a solid grounding in God's love, which he notes leads to humility, for we do not need to boast or prove ourselves before others. He notes also that the saints are full of joy and have good senses of humor, and they are bold. They do not ask, "How have we always done things?" but "What new solution might address this problem today?" This is not a lack of fidelity to tradition, but it is drawing on the tradition to resolve today's problems. We must be part of a community, he adds, and spend time in prayer. Not long hours, but time in prayer to discern what God is asking of us.

His antidotes are good solutions, and the whole document is worth reading. It is quite manageable, only about 40 pages, and I hope you take the time to learn more about the ways that our Holy Father is encouraging and challenging us. May God bless you.