

Editorial

Rejoice and Be Glad!

Fr Chris Hayden
Editor



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Photo: The Editor

One of the most striking descriptions of faith I have ever come across was penned by the English writer, Caryl Chessman, in the introduction to her book, *The Reed of God*. On the wisdom and direction our faith offers, Chessman writes: 'Everyone longs for some such inward rule, a universal rule as big as the immeasurable law of love, yet as little as the narrowness of our daily routine.'

What an amazing insight into an amazing blessing! Our faith is as big as the universe: it gives us a vision we can always be striving after, an arc under which every day of our lives, every period of history, is lived. At the very same time, our faith is as small as each moment; while making sense of the broad sweep of things, it assures us that even the tiniest of episodes has its own significance.

Because Chessman's words struck me so powerfully when I first read them a number of years back, I was very taken by some of the language of Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate – On the Call to Holiness in Today's World*. 'Discernment,' the Pope writes, 'involves striving untrammelled for all that is great, better and more beautiful, while at the same time being concerned for the little things, for each day's responsibilities and commitments' (n. 169).

It seems to me that in the interplay between the broad vision and the concrete daily concern, there is something of a key to the present pontificate, particularly in its relationship to the previous two. St John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI brilliantly articulated and courageously guarded the broad vision. They also, of course, inspired the living out of that vision in countless believers. However, in the present Pope there is a particular emphasis on the application of the vision.

Francis is a man of action, who wants our faith to be a matter of action. If he seems, at times, to be impatient with ideas, that is not, as some would have it, because he disdains theological abstraction *per se*. If the present Pope disdains anything, it is a faith that has been, or risks being, reduced to a set of abstractions.

There is certainly nothing abstract about the Pope's recent document on holiness. *Gaudete et Exsultate* is simply written and utterly practical. Pope Francis states at the outset that 'What follows is not meant to be a treatise on holiness, containing definitions and distinctions helpful for understanding ...' His aim, rather, is 'to re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities.'

Although he is a practical man, a man of action, Francis does not reduce holiness to action; he is far too wise a thinker to court the error of activism. As concrete manifestations of holiness, our work, actions and ministry are to be rooted in prayer and lead to prayer. Conversely, authentic prayer will motivate, support and arise from our labours.

Gaudete et Exsultate is a wonderful teaching document. Carefully pondered, it does what it says: it gives us reason to rejoice and be glad!

Chris Hayden