

Evangelii Gaudium -- Selections and commentary by Fr. Kenneth W. Schmidt

I must admit that I am very inspired by Pope Francis. Pope John Paul II was an incredible philosopher, and his work will be inspirational for generations of philosophers who follow him. Pope Benedict XVI is an incredible theologian, and his work will also have a profound effect on future generations of believers. Pope John Paul II brought his philosophy background to his role as the Bishop of Rome, just as Benedict XVI brought his theological expertise to the office. Pope Francis brings his experience of being a pastor. Growing up, though, I did not aspire to be a philosopher, or a theologian, although seminary training includes both of those fields. I grew up wanting to be a pastor. And Pope Francis inspires me and challenges me to be a better pastor.

The latest document by Pope Francis is called *Evangelii Gaudium* (= The Joy of the Gospel; its first words give this document its title). I don't think that many of us are going to read his 80-page document, so I have selected passages from his text and offered some personal comments that will appear in the new year both in the bulletin and on the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (1) -- To start our review of his new document, here's what Pope Francis himself says about Church documents: **I am aware that nowadays documents do not arouse the same interest as in the past and that they are quickly forgotten. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that what I am trying to express here has a programmatic significance and important consequences. I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. "Mere administration" can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be "permanently in a state of mission."** (para. 25) Pope Francis realizes that people may not get very excited about his writing another document. But still he writes, challenging us to move out of ministry which is merely Church management.

The Joy of the Gospel (2) -- Pope Francis suggests that Christians ought to be known for their joy – not a superficial happiness because my desires are met, but a profound joy because I realize that, despite my limitations and faults, my emptiness and loneliness, I am loved by God and have been redeemed from my sin. The presumption is that we will naturally want to share that awareness with others, and that's "evangelization." Using a phrase that translates literally as "the face of a pickled pepper," Pope Francis said in a homily that when Christians have more of a sourpuss than a face that communicates the joy of being loved by God, they harm the witness of the church. **"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."** (para. 1-2) Later he adds: **"There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter."** (para. 6) This is the profound danger of not growing in our faith and spirituality. *If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.*

The Joy of the Gospel (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 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." 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. (para. 4) This is a frequent theme of Pope Francis – the face of God is not criticism or judgment, but compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. We must first have that experience for ourselves; then we can show it to others.

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***The Joy of the Gospel (4)* – Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met. To some extent this is because our "technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy." (para. 7) Here Pope Francis makes a helpful distinction between moments of pleasure and the emotion of joy. Do we settle for piling up moments of pleasure when God offers us joy? Selfishness seeks pleasure; trust in God and extending ourselves to others bring joy. Consequently, an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral! (para. 10)**

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***The Joy of the Gospel (5)* – 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." 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. (para. 12) Pope Francis reminds us that it is God's desire that we know God; we are simply messengers and examples of the joy and fulfillment that come when we participate in this mission of God. The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance The apostles never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts: "It was about four o'clock in the afternoon." (Jn 1:39) . . . The believer is essentially "one who remembers." (para. 13) Do I remember my own moments of conversion, my personal experiences of encountering Christ, knowing God is with me, feeling God loving me, realizing that God has forgiven me?**

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The Joy of the Gospel (6) – How does Pope Francis see his role? Not as many Catholics expect! He does not see himself as the one who makes pronouncements about every problem in the world or in the Church, and there are many others to be consulted even when he writes documents like this one: **I have sought advice from a number of people and I intend to express my own concerns about this particular chapter of the Church's work of evangelization. . . . Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound "decentralization."** (para. 16) He admits that he has focused on some issues that personally concern him as they relate to the Church's mission to share the Gospel:

- a) **the reform of the Church in her missionary outreach;**
- b) **the temptations faced by pastoral workers;**
- c) **the Church, understood as the entire People of God which evangelizes;**
- d) **the homily and its preparation;**
- e) **the inclusion of the poor in society;**
- f) **peace and dialogue within society;**
- g) **the spiritual motivations for mission.**

I have dealt extensively with these topics, with a detail which some may find excessive. But I have done so, not with the intention of providing an exhaustive treatise but simply as a way of showing their important practical implications for the Church's mission today. (para. 17-18)

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The Joy of the Gospel (7) – In our day Jesus' command to "go and make disciples" echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary "going forth." Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel. (para. 20) It still surprises many Catholics to hear that evangelizing is the core of "what we're supposed to do." So many of our efforts are focused on other things, rather than the Gospel command to "get out there." And 'out there' does not mean "hang out with everyone who thinks like I do." As Pope Francis so aptly told priests, "a shepherd should have the smell of sheep on him."

Evangelization will be not be neat and orderly. Nor will it be limited to certain people or places. **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.** (para. 22) **In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.** (para. 23)

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The Joy of the Gospel (8) – 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. He tells his disciples: "You will be blessed if you do this." (Jn 13:17) An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be. It is familiar with patient expectation and apostolic endurance. Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time. (para. 24)

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The Joy of the Gospel (9) – This is the introduction to a section in which Pope Francis refers to how the Church with its structures can carry out its mission. He speaks about ecclesial movements (e.g., charismatic renewal, cursillos, and small Christian communities), dioceses, and parishes. He describes what parishes do well, and how they need to improve: **There are ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization, yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them. Without new life and an authentic evangelical spirit, without the Church's "fidelity to her own calling," any new structure will soon prove ineffective.** (para 26)

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The Joy of the Gospel (10) –Pope Francis presents his vision of what a great parish can be: **The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if it proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be "the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters."** This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable

outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented. (para. 28)
How are we doing?

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***The Joy of the Gospel (11)* –Speaking about church structures, Pope Francis admits that also needed is a conversion of the papacy. It is my duty, as the Bishop of Rome, to be open to suggestions which can help make the exercise of my ministry more faithful to the meaning which Jesus Christ wished to give it and to the present needs of evangelization. Pope John Paul II asked for help in finding "a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation." We have made little progress in this regard. The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion. . . . Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church's life and her missionary outreach. (para. 32)**

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***The Joy of the Gospel (12)* – Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: "We have always done it this way." I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment. Does this kind of thinking make you nervous or excited? (para. 33)**

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***The Joy of the Gospel (13)* -- Pope Francis wants to make sure that the heart of the Gospel is heard, when sometimes the emphasis is misplaced. If we attempt to put all things in a missionary key, this will also affect the way we communicate the message. In today's world of instant communication and occasionally biased media coverage, the message we preach runs a greater risk of being distorted or reduced to some of its secondary aspects. In this way certain issues which are part of the Church's moral teaching are taken out of the context which gives them their meaning. The biggest problem is when the message we preach then seems identified with those secondary aspects which, important as they are, do**

not in and of themselves convey the heart of Christ's message. We need to be realistic and not assume that our audience understands the full background to what we are saying, or is capable of relating what we say to the very heart of the Gospel which gives it meaning, beauty and attractiveness.

Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing. (para. 34-35)

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The Joy of the Gospel (14) -- Pope Francis reminds us that everything that the Church teaches is not of equal importance. **All revealed truths derive from the same divine source and are to be believed with the same faith, yet some of them are more important for giving direct expression to the heart of the Gospel. In this basic core, what shines forth is the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead. In this sense, the Second Vatican Council explained, "in Catholic doctrine there exists an order or a 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith." This holds true as much for the dogmas of faith as for the whole corpus of the Church's teaching, including her moral teaching.** (para. 36) What we eat on Fridays as a sign of personal penitence is not as important as proclaiming Jesus showed us the merciful face of God. He goes on to quote St. Thomas Aquinas: **"In itself mercy is the greatest of the virtues, since all the others revolve around it and, more than this, it makes up for their deficiencies. This is particular to the superior virtue, and as such it is proper to God to have mercy, through which his omnipotence is manifested to the greatest degree."** (para. 37)

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The Joy of the Gospel (15) -- The integrity of the Gospel message must not be deformed. What is more, each truth is better understood when related to the harmonious totality of the Christian message; in this context all of the truths are important and illumine one another. When preaching is faithful to the Gospel, the centrality of certain truths is evident and it becomes clear that Christian morality is not a form of stoicism, or self-denial, or merely a practical philosophy or a catalogue of sins and faults. Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others. Under no circumstance can this invitation be obscured! All of the virtues are at the service of this response of love. If this invitation does not radiate forcefully and attractively, the edifice of the Church's moral teaching risks becoming a house of cards, and this is our greatest risk. It would mean that it is not the Gospel which is being preached, but certain doctrinal or moral points based on

specific ideological options. The message will run the risk of losing its freshness and will cease to have "the fragrance of the Gospel." (para. 39) This is one of the passages that captured a lot of attention among the media. Many people interpreted what he said, but here we let Pope Francis speak for himself.

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The Joy of the Gospel (16) -- Pope Francis reminds us that **the task of evangelization operates within the limits of language and of circumstances.** (para. 45) **For those who long for a monolithic body of doctrine guarded by all and leaving no room for nuance, this might appear as undesirable and leading to confusion. But in fact such variety serves to bring out and develop different facets of the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel.** (para. 40) **At the same time, today's vast and rapid cultural changes demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness. "The deposit of the faith is one thing... the way it is expressed is another." There are times when the faithful, in listening to completely orthodox language, take away something alien to the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ, because that language is alien to their own way of speaking to and understanding one another. With the holy intent of communicating the truth about God and humanity, we sometimes give them a false god or a human ideal which is not really Christian. In this way, we hold fast to a formulation while failing to convey its substance. This is the greatest danger. Let us never forget that "the expression of truth can take different forms. The renewal of these forms of expression becomes necessary for the sake of transmitting to the people of today the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning."** (para. 41) Pope Francis' thoughts raised concerns among some people, who said that the words we use in order to express the truth may change. For example, how many of us understand Aristotle's philosophical categories well enough to explain what "transubstantiation" means? Might we in the 21st century need to use new vocabulary to teach what the eucharistic "Real Presence" is? Pope Francis admits that the words we use to teach the Gospel have to vary through the ages. **We should not think, however, that the Gospel message must always be communicated by fixed formulations learned by heart or by specific words which express an absolutely invariable content. This communication takes place in so many different ways that it would be impossible to describe or catalogue them all.** (para. 129)

The Joy of the Gospel (17) -- **In her ongoing discernment, the Church can also come to see that certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some which have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated. Some of these customs may be beautiful, but they no longer serve as means of communicating the Gospel. We should not be afraid to re-examine them. At the same time, the Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people's lives. Saint Thomas Aquinas pointed out that the precepts which Christ and the apostles gave to the people of God "are very few."** (para. 43)

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The Joy of the Gospel (18) -- **The Catechism of the Catholic Church** teaches quite clearly: "Imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors." Consequently, without detracting from the evangelical ideal, they need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur. I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best. A small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties. Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God's saving love, which is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings. (para. 44) At root we are sinners, not perfect people, taking small steps on a journey urged onward by faith.

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The Joy of the Gospel (19) -- **The Church** is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. There are other doors that should not be closed either. Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself "the door:" baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems. (para. 46) It remains to be seen how Pope Francis' challenge of "prudence and boldness" will be interpreted in the laws and the pastoral practice of the Church. However, it also depends on the attitudes that people experience when they approach us and come in the door.

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The Joy of the Gospel (20) -- What should bother us as Catholics? Pope Francis writes: **I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are**

living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37). (para 49). *If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.*

The Joy of the Gospel (21) -- Certain factors which can restrain or weaken the impulse of missionary renewal in the Church, either because they threaten the life and dignity of God's people or because they affect those who are directly involved in the Church's institutions and in her work of evangelization. (para. 51) One of those factors is the "economy of exclusion." Pope Francis writes: **Today we also have to say "thou shalt not" to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape.**

Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a "disposable" culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society's underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the "exploited" but the outcast, the "leftovers."

In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting. To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase; and in the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us. (para. 53-54)

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The Joy of the Gospel (22) -- Certain factors which can restrain or weaken the impulse of missionary renewal in the Church, either because they threaten the life and dignity of God's people or because they affect those who are directly involved in the Church's institutions and in her work of evangelization. (para. 51) One of those factors is the "idolatry of money." Pope Francis writes: **We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Ex 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. . . . While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is thus born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules. Debt and the accumulation of interest also make it difficult for countries to realize the potential of their own economies and keep citizens from enjoying their real purchasing power. To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions. The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule.** (para. 55-56)

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The Joy of the Gospel (23) -- Certain factors which can restrain or weaken the impulse of missionary renewal in the Church, either because they threaten the life and dignity of God's people or because they affect those who are directly involved in the Church's institutions and in her work of evangelization. (para. 51) One of those factors is "a financial system that rules rather than serves. Pope Francis writes: **I encourage financial experts and political leaders to ponder the words of one of the sages of antiquity: "Not to share one's wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs."** [St. John Chrysostom, *De Lazaro Concio*, II, 6: PG 48, 992D] **Money must serve, not rule! The Pope loves everyone, rich and poor alike, but he is obliged in the name of Christ to remind all that the rich must help, respect and promote the poor. I exhort you to generous solidarity and a return of economics and finance to an ethical approach which favors human beings.** (para. 57-58)

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The Joy of the Gospel (24) -- Certain factors which can restrain or weaken the impulse of missionary renewal in the Church, either because they threaten the life and dignity of God's people or because they affect those who are directly involved in the Church's institutions and in her work of evangelization. (para. 51) One of those factors is an inequality which spawns violence. Pope Francis writes: **Today in many places we hear a call for greater security. But until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples is**

reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. The poor and the poorer peoples are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities the different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode. When a society – whether local, national or global – is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programs or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility. This is not the case simply because inequality provokes a violent reaction from those excluded from the system, but because the socioeconomic system is unjust at its root. (para. 59) I would add that we must be cautious about blaming the victims, as if they have brought all their problems on themselves (by being poor).

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The Joy of the Gospel (25) – Lots of people feel like they have no place in the Church, that they are not welcome. Rather than blame others, Pope Francis says: **We must recognize that if part of our baptized people lack a sense of belonging to the Church, this is also due to certain structures and the occasionally unwelcoming atmosphere of some of our parishes and communities, or to a bureaucratic way of dealing with problems, be they simple or complex, in the lives of our people. In many places an administrative approach prevails over a pastoral approach, as does a concentration on administering the sacraments apart from other forms of evangelization.** (para. 63) That is certainly something for us to take to heart right here in our community.

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The Joy of the Gospel (26) -- Here's what Pope Francis teaches about the place of the Church in a secular age: **The process of secularization tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal. Furthermore, by completely rejecting the transcendent, it has produced a growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin, and a steady increase in relativism. These have led to a general sense of disorientation, especially in the periods of adolescence and young adulthood which are so vulnerable to change. As the bishops of the United States of America have rightly pointed out, while the Church insists on the existence of objective moral norms which are valid for everyone, "there are those in our culture who portray this teaching as unjust, that is, as opposed to basic human rights. Such claims usually follow from a form of moral relativism that is joined, not without inconsistency, to a belief in the absolute rights of individuals. In this view, the Church is perceived as promoting a particular prejudice and as interfering with individual freedom." We are living in an information-driven society which bombards us indiscriminately with data – all treated as being of equal importance – and which leads to remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment. In response, we need to provide an education which teaches critical thinking and encourages the development of mature moral values.**

Despite the tide of secularism which has swept our societies, in many countries – even those where Christians are a minority – the Catholic Church is considered a credible institution by public opinion, and trusted for her solidarity and concern for those in

greatest need. Again and again, the Church has acted as a mediator in finding solutions to problems affecting peace, social harmony, the land, the defense of life, human and civil rights, and so forth. And how much good has been done by Catholic schools and universities around the world! This is a good thing. Yet, we find it difficult to make people see that when we raise other questions less palatable to public opinion, we are doing so out of fidelity to precisely the same convictions about human dignity and the common good. (para. 64-65.)

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The Joy of the Gospel (27) -- Pope Francis commends all the members of the Church for the service they offer to the world, as he acknowledges the power of sin at work in himself. **In justice, I must say first that the contribution of the Church in today's world is enormous. The pain and the shame we feel at the sins of some members of the Church, and at our own, must never make us forget how many Christians are giving their lives in love. They help so many people to be healed or to die in peace in makeshift hospitals. They are present to those enslaved by different addictions in the poorest places on earth. They devote themselves to the education of children and young people. They take care of the elderly who have been forgotten by everyone else. They look for ways to communicate values in hostile environments. They are dedicated in many other ways to showing an immense love for humanity inspired by the God who became man. I am grateful for the beautiful example given to me by so many Christians who joyfully sacrifice their lives and their time. This witness comforts and sustains me in my own effort to overcome selfishness and to give more fully of myself.** (para. 76) Pope Francis captures the sentiments of many pastors!

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (28) -- After commending the good work of pastoral ministers, he expresses his concern for temptations that face pastoral workers, including a desire for personal freedom and relaxation, "a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervor." (para. 78) He also points to skepticism, cynicism, an inferiority complex, and a "desire to be like everyone else." (para. 79) Another concern **has to do with the deepest and inmost decisions that shape their way of life. This practical relativism consists in acting as if God did not exist, making decisions as if the poor did not exist, setting goals as if others did not exist, working as if people who have not received the Gospel did not exist. It is striking that even some who clearly have solid doctrinal and spiritual convictions frequently fall into a lifestyle which leads to an attachment to financial security, or to a desire for power or human glory at all cost, rather than giving their lives to others in mission. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary enthusiasm!** (para. 80) Finally, he sees pastoral workers worn down by pessimism and defeatism so that "a tomb psychology thus develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum. Disillusioned with reality, with the Church and with themselves, they experience a constant temptation to cling to a faint melancholy, lacking in hope" (para. 83)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (29) -- Pope Francis warns us about some forms of spiritual worldliness: **One is the attraction of gnosticism, a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings. The other is the self-absorbed promethean neopelagianism of those who ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style from the past. A supposed soundness of doctrine or discipline leads instead to a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying. In neither case is one really concerned about Jesus Christ or others.** (para. 94) *If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.*

The Joy of the Gospel (30) -- Pope Francis names some more forms of spiritual worldliness: **In some people we see an ostentatious preoccupation for the liturgy, for doctrine and for the Church's prestige, but without any concern that the Gospel have a real impact on God's faithful people and the concrete needs of the present time. In this way, the life of the Church turns into a museum piece or something which is the property of a select few. In others, this spiritual worldliness lurks behind a fascination with social and political gain, or pride in their ability to manage practical affairs, or an obsession with programs of self-help and self-realization. It can also translate into a concern to be seen, into a social life full of appearances, meetings, dinners and receptions. It can also lead to a business mentality, caught up with management, statistics, plans and evaluations whose principal beneficiary is not God's people but the Church as an institution.** **Our history as a Church is glorious precisely because it is a history of sacrifice, of hopes and daily struggles, of lives spent in service and fidelity to work, tiring as it may be, for all work is "the sweat of our brow." Instead, we waste time talking about "what needs to be done" like spiritual masters and pastoral experts who give instructions from on high. We indulge in endless fantasies and we lose contact with the real lives and difficulties of our people.** (para. 95-96)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (31) -- Pope Francis speaks next about the laity, and the clericalism of the minority which interferes with the full role of the laity: **Lay people are, put simply, the vast majority of the People of God. The minority – ordained ministers – are at their service. There has been a growing awareness of the identity and mission of the laity in the Church. We can count on many lay persons, although still not nearly enough, who have a deeply-rooted sense of community and great fidelity to the tasks of charity, catechesis and the**

celebration of the faith. At the same time, a clear awareness of this responsibility of the laity, grounded in their baptism and confirmation, does not appear in the same way in all places. In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision-making. Even if many are now involved in the lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors. It often remains tied to tasks within the Church, without a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society. The formation of the laity and the evangelization of professional and intellectual life represent a significant pastoral challenge. (para 102)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (32) -- Pope Francis speaks about women in the Church. It is carefully worded, and yet not everyone will agree: **Demands that the legitimate rights of women be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity, present the Church with profound and challenging questions which cannot be lightly evaded. The reservation of the priesthood to males, as a sign of Christ the Spouse who gives himself in the Eucharist, is not a question open to discussion, but it can prove especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general. It must be remembered that when we speak of sacramental power "we are in the realm of function, not that of dignity or holiness."** The ministerial priesthood is one means employed by Jesus for the service of his people, yet our great dignity derives from baptism, which is accessible to all. The configuration of the priest to Christ the head – namely, as the principal source of grace – does not imply an exaltation which would set him above others. In the Church, functions "do not favor the superiority of some vis-à-vis the others." Indeed, a woman, Mary, is more important than the bishops. Even when the function of ministerial priesthood is considered "hierarchical," it must be remembered that "it is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's members." Its key and axis is not power understood as domination, but the power to administer the sacrament of the Eucharist; this is the origin of its authority, which is always a service to God's people. This presents a great challenge for pastors and theologians, who are in a position to recognize more fully what this entails with regard to the possible role of women in decision-making in different areas of the Church's life. (para. 104)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (33) – Pope Francis starts a new section, with his wonder-filled excitement to be a Church called to share the Gospel with the world: **Evangelization is the task of the Church.** (para. 111) **The salvation which God has wrought, and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone. . . . No one is saved by himself or herself, individually, or by his or her own efforts. To those who feel far from God and the Church, to all those who are fearful or indifferent, I would like to say this: the Lord, with great respect and love, is also**

calling you to be a part of his people! (para. 113). **Being Church means being God's people, in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love. means that we are to be God's leaven in the midst of humanity. It means proclaiming and bringing God's salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.** (para. 114)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (34) – Pope Francis reminds us that demand to evangelize flows from the sacrament of Baptism (not Holy Orders): **In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus.** (para. 120) **Each of us should find ways to communicate Jesus wherever we are. All of us are called to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord, who despite our imperfections offers us his closeness, his word and his strength, and gives meaning to our lives. In your heart you know that it is not the same to live without him; what you have come to realize, what has helped you to live and given you hope, is what you also need to communicate to others. Our falling short of perfection should be no excuse; on the contrary, mission is a constant stimulus not to remain mired in mediocrity but to continue growing.** (para. 121)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (35) – Pope Francis goes on to speak of 'popular piety,' i.e., the spirituality of the people or "the people' mysticism": **Once looked down upon, popular piety came to be appreciated once more in the decades following the Council. . . . [Pope Paul VI] stated that popular piety "manifests a thirst for God which only the poor and the simple can know" and that "it makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of bearing witness to belief." [Popular piety is] "a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly." Nor is it devoid of content; rather it discovers and expresses that content more by way of symbols than by discursive reasoning. . . . It is "a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling part of the Church and a manner of being missionaries." . . . [Then we] can we appreciate the theological life present in the piety of Christian peoples, especially among their poor. I think of the steadfast faith of those mothers tending their sick children who, though perhaps barely familiar with the articles of the creed, cling to a rosary; or of all the hope poured into a candle lighted in a humble home with a prayer for help from Mary, or in the gaze of tender love directed to Christ crucified. No one who loves God's holy people will view these actions as the**

expression of a purely human search for the divine. They are the manifestation of a theological life nourished by the working of the Holy Spirit who has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5). (para. 123-125)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (36) – Pope Francis provides us with a beautiful and non-threatening manner of sharing the Gospel with others: **Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey. In this preaching, which is always respectful and gentle, the first step is personal dialogue, when the other person speaks and shares his or her joys, hopes and concerns for loved ones, or so many other heartfelt needs. Only afterwards is it possible to bring up God's word, perhaps by reading a Bible verse or relating a story, but always keeping in mind the fundamental message: the personal love of God who became man, who gave himself up for us, who is living and who offers us his salvation and his friendship. This message has to be shared humbly as a testimony on the part of one who is always willing to learn, in the awareness that the message is so rich and so deep that it always exceeds our grasp. At times the message can be presented directly, at times by way of a personal witness or gesture, or in a way which the Holy Spirit may suggest in that particular situation. If it seems prudent and if the circumstances are right, this fraternal and missionary encounter could end with a brief prayer related to the concerns which the person may have expressed. In this way they will have an experience of being listened to and understood; they will know that their particular situation has been placed before God, and that God's word really speaks to their lives.** (para. 127-128)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (37) – What does Pope Francis have to say to scientists, educators, and universities? **When certain categories of reason and the sciences are taken up into the proclamation of the message, these categories then become tools of evangelization; water is changed into wine. Whatever is taken up is not just redeemed, but becomes an instrument of the Spirit for enlightening and renewing the world. . . . Universities are outstanding environments for articulating and developing this evangelizing commitment in an interdisciplinary and integrated way. Catholic schools, which always strive to join their work of education with the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, are a most valuable resource for the evangelization of culture. . . .** (para. 132, 134) Just so you know, Pope Francis then dedicates almost 10% of the document addressed to those of us who preach (para. 135-159).

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (38) – While each of us can and must evangelize, we have a personal responsibility to also grow in our own faith, which is more about personal growth than merely learning doctrine: **The Lord's missionary mandate includes a call to growth in faith, . . . for ongoing formation and maturation. Evangelization aims at a process of growth which entails taking seriously each person and God's plan for his or her life. All of us need to grow in Christ. Evangelization should stimulate a desire for this growth . . .**

161. It would not be right to see this call to growth exclusively or primarily in terms of doctrinal formation. It has to do with "observing" all that the Lord has shown us as the way of responding to his love. . . . Clearly, whenever the New Testament authors want to present the heart of the Christian moral message, they present the essential requirement of love for one's neighbor: "The one who loves *his neighbor* has fulfilled the whole law... therefore love of neighbor is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:8, 10). These are the words of Saint Paul, for whom the commandment of love not only sums up the law but constitutes its very heart and purpose: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal 5:14). (para 160-161) *If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.*

The Joy of the Gospel (39) – Pope Francis reminds us what is the primary announcement [*kerygma*] of one who evangelizes: **On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you." This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the *principal* proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment.** (para. 164) He goes on to describe the attitudes of one who evangelizes: **It is the message capable of responding to the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart. The centrality of the kerygma calls for stressing those elements which are most needed today: it has to express God's saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; it should not impose the truth but appeal to freedom; it should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness and a harmonious balance which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are at times more philosophical than evangelical. All this demands on the part of the evangelizer certain attitudes which foster openness to the message: approachability, readiness for dialogue, patience, a warmth and welcome which is non-judgmental.** (para. 165)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (40) – Pope Francis desires all members of the Church to learn the "art of accompaniment" which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Exod 3:5). **The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.** (para 169) . . . We need to practice the art of

listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Listening helps us to find the right gesture and word which shows that we are more than simply bystanders. Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God's love and to bring to fruition what he has sown in our lives. (para 171) One who accompanies others has to realize that each person's situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries which no one can fully know from without. . . . Our personal experience of being accompanied and assisted, and of openness to those who accompany us, will teach us to be patient and compassionate with others, and to find the right way to gain their trust, their openness and their readiness to grow. (para. 172)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (41) – Pope Francis then describes a natural consequence of the "primary announcement" of good news[kerygma]: **Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God's love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others.** (para. 178) God's Word teaches us: "As you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). The way we treat others has a transcendent dimension: "the measure you give will be the measure you get" (Mt 7:2). It corresponds to the mercy which God has shown us: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. . . . For the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Lk 6:36-38). What these passages make clear is the absolute priority of "going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters" as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God's completely free gift. (para 179)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (42) – The Gospel is not merely a message that we should commit "random acts of kindness; it is so much more! **The Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. Nor should our loving response to God be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of "charity à la carte," or a series of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. The Gospel is about the kingdom of God** (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society. (para. 180) **Consequently, no one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events**

affecting society. . . . An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters. . . . All Christians, their pastors included, are called to show concern for the building of a better world. This is essential, for the Church's social thought is primarily positive: it offers proposals, it works for change and in this sense it constantly points to the hope born of the loving heart of Jesus Christ. (para. 183)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (43) – We already know well Pope Francis' consistent reminder that we must be concerned for the poor. **Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid. . . . In this context we can understand Jesus' command to his disciples: "You yourselves give them something to eat!" (Mk 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter. The word "solidarity" is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. . . . Solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them. . . . Changing structures without generating new convictions and attitudes will only ensure that those same structures will become, sooner or later, corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual.** (para. 187-189)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (44) – Pope Francis spells out what is expected from those who have adequate resources: **With due respect for the autonomy and culture of every nation, we must never forget that the planet belongs to all humankind and is meant for all humankind; the mere fact that some people are born in places with fewer resources or less development does not justify the fact that they are living with less dignity. It must be reiterated that "the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others."** [*Octogesima Adveniens* (14 May 1971), para. 23] . . . Yet we desire even more than this; our dream soars higher. . . . This means education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives. A just wage enables them to have adequate access to all the other goods which are destined for our common use. We incarnate the duty of hearing the cry of the poor when we are deeply moved by the suffering of others. . . . Jesus taught us this way of looking at others by his words and his actions. So why cloud something so clear? We

should not be concerned simply about falling into doctrinal error, but about remaining faithful to this light-filled path of life and wisdom. (para. 190-194) These are challenging words!

The Joy of the Gospel (45) – Pope Francis speaks from his heart about our Church choosing to make the poor our preferred option, the ones who guide our priorities. God's preference for the poor has consequences for the faith life of all Christians, since we are called to have "this mind... which was in Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:5). . . . This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them. . . . The poor person, when loved, "is esteemed as of great value," [Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, I-II, q. 26, a. 3] and this is what makes the authentic option for the poor differ from any other ideology, from any attempt to exploit the poor for one's own personal or political interest. Only on the basis of this real and sincere closeness can we properly accompany the poor on their path of liberation. Only this will ensure that "in every Christian community the poor feel at home. Would not this approach be the greatest and most effective presentation of the good news of the kingdom?" [*Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), para. 50] (para. 198-199)
If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (46) – Here Pope Francis writes quite frankly to us: **No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas. This is an excuse commonly heard in academic, business or professional, and even ecclesial circles. While it is quite true that the essential vocation and mission of the lay faithful is to strive that earthly realities and all human activity may be transformed by the Gospel, none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice That being said, I trust in the openness and readiness of all Christians, and I ask you to seek, as a community, creative ways of accepting this renewed call.** (para. 201)

Pope Francis concludes with as statement about his intentions: **If anyone feels offended by my words, I would respond that I speak them with affection and with the best of intentions, quite apart from any personal interest or political ideology. My words are not those of a foe or an opponent. I am interested only in helping those who are in thrall to an individualistic, indifferent and self-centered mentality to be freed from those unworthy chains and to attain a way of living and thinking which is more humane, noble and fruitful, and which will bring dignity to their presence on this earth.** (para. 208)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (47) – The "poor" we must care for also include people who are vulnerable. Pope Francis mentions those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking – sex workers, children used for begging, undocumented laborers, and women who are subject to exclusion, mistreatment, and violence. Pope Francis also draws attention to the vulnerability of all the unborn, who are innocent and unable to defend their lives. (211-213) We're also called to care for our vulnerable planet and its creatures (para. 215). **Small yet strong in the love of God, like Saint Francis of Assisi, all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples.** (para. 216)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (48) – Pope Francis next turns his attention to the Church's work for peace. **Peace in society cannot be understood as pacification or the mere absence of violence resulting from the domination of one part of society over others. Nor is peace "simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day towards the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect justice among men."** In the end, a peace which is not the result of integral development will be doomed; it will always spawn new conflicts and various forms of violence. (para. 218-219)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (49) – **Progress in building a people in peace, justice and fraternity depends on four principles related to constant tensions present in every social reality. These derive from the pillars of the Church's social doctrine.** (para. 221) These four themes will be addressed in the weeks to come:

1. *Time is greater than space*
2. *Unity prevails over conflict*
3. *Realities are more important than ideas*
4. *The whole is greater than the part, and the sum of its parts*

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (50) – Pope Francis names some tensions we experience in our current social reality: **1. Time is greater than space. This principle enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in our plans. . . . Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces.** (para. 223)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

*The Joy of the Gospel (51) – Pope Francis names some tensions we experience in our current social reality: 2. **Unity prevails over conflict.** When conflict arises, some people simply look at it and go their way as if nothing happened The best way to deal with conflict . . . is the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process. . . . In this way it becomes possible to build communion amid disagreement, but this can only be achieved by those great persons who are willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity. (para. 227-228) The message of peace is not about a negotiated settlement but rather the conviction that the unity brought by the Spirit can harmonize every diversity. (para. 230)*

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

*The Joy of the Gospel (52) – Pope Francis names some tensions we experience in our current social reality: 3. **Realities are more important than ideas.** We have politicians – and even religious leaders – who wonder why people do not understand and follow them, since their proposals are so clear and logical. Perhaps it is because they are stuck in the realm of pure ideas and end up reducing politics or faith to rhetoric. (para. 232) . . . This principle impels us to put the word into practice, to perform works of justice and charity which make that word fruitful. Not to put the word into practice, not to make it reality, is to build on sand, to remain in the realm of pure ideas and to end up in a lifeless and unfruitful self-centeredness and gnosticism. (para. 233)*

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

*The Joy of the Gospel (53) – Pope Francis names some tensions we experience in our current social reality: 4. **The whole is greater than the part, and the sum of its parts.** We need to pay attention to the global so as to avoid narrowness and banality. Yet we also need to look to the local, which keeps our feet on the ground. . . . We constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all. . . . We can work on a small scale, in our own neighborhood, but with a larger perspective. Nor do people who wholeheartedly enter into the life of a community need to lose their individualism or hide their identity. . . . It is the convergence of peoples who, within the universal order, maintain their own individuality; it is the sum total of persons within a society which pursues the common good, which truly has a place for everyone. (para. 234-236)*

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

*The Joy of the Gospel (54) – Pope Francis does not believe that the Church should stand alone as if it knows everything. Situations change and they require new solutions and new language. **Neither the Pope nor the Church have a monopoly on the interpretation of social realities or the proposal of solutions to contemporary problems.** Here I can repeat the insightful observation of Pope Paul VI: "In the face of such widely varying situations, it is difficult*

for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. This is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country." [*Octogesima Adveniens* (14 May 1971), para. 4] (para. 184)

Therefore, evangelization also involves the path of dialogue. For the Church today, three areas of dialogue stand out where she needs to be present in order to promote full human development and to pursue the common good: dialogue with states, dialogue with society – including dialogue with cultures and the sciences – and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church. (para. 238)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (55) – Pope Francis tells us that evangelization must include dialogue, including a) dialogue between nations. The Church proclaims "the Gospel of peace" (Eph 6:15) and she wishes to cooperate with all national and international authorities in safeguarding this immense universal good. By preaching Jesus Christ, who is himself peace (cf. Eph 2:14), the new evangelization calls on every baptized person to be a peacemaker and a credible witness to a reconciled life. In a culture which privileges dialogue as a form of encounter, it is time to devise a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society. We do not need plans drawn up by a few for the few, or an enlightened or outspoken minority which claims to speak for everyone. It is about agreeing to live together, a social and cultural pact. . . . In her dialogue with the State and with society, the Church does not have solutions for every particular issue. Together with the various sectors of society, she supports those programs which best respond to the dignity of each person and the common good. (para. 239-241)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (56) – Pope Francis tells us that evangelization must include dialogue, including b) dialogue between faith, reason and science. Dialogue between science and faith also belongs to the work of evangelization at the service of peace. The Church proposes another path, which calls for a synthesis between the responsible use of methods proper to the empirical sciences and other areas of knowledge such as philosophy, theology, as well as faith itself, which elevates us to the mystery transcending nature and human intelligence. Faith is not fearful of reason; on the contrary, it seeks and trusts reason, since "the light of reason and the light of faith both come from God" and cannot contradict each other. . . . The Church has no wish to hold back the marvelous progress of science. On the contrary, she rejoices and even delights in acknowledging the enormous potential that God has given to the human mind. (para. 242-243)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (57) – Pope Francis tells us that evangelization must include dialogue, including **c) ecumenical dialogue**. **Commitment to ecumenism responds to the prayer of the Lord Jesus that "they may all be one" (Jn 17:21). The credibility of the Christian message would be much greater if Christians could overcome their divisions We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face. Trusting others is an art and peace is an art. . . . In this perspective, ecumenism can be seen as a contribution to the unity of the human family. . . . If we concentrate on the convictions we share, and if we keep in mind the principle of the hierarchy of truths, we will be able to progress decidedly towards common expressions of proclamation, service and witness. . . . If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us. . . . Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness.** (para. 244-246)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (55) – Pope Francis tells us that evangelization must include dialogue, including **d) relations with Judaism**. **We hold the Jewish people in special regard because their covenant with God has never been revoked, for "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). The Church, which shares with Jews an important part of the sacred Scriptures, looks upon the people of the covenant and their faith as one of the sacred roots of her own Christian identity (cf. Rom 11:16-18). As Christians, we cannot consider Judaism as a foreign religion; nor do we include the Jews among those called to turn from idols and to serve the true God (cf. 1 Thes 1:9). With them, we believe in the one God who acts in history, and with them we accept his revealed word. Dialogue and friendship with the children of Israel are part of the life of Jesus' disciples. The friendship which has grown between us makes us bitterly and sincerely regret the terrible persecutions which they have endured, and continue to endure, especially those that have involved Christians. God continues to work among the people of the Old Covenant and to bring forth treasures of wisdom which flow from their encounter with his word. For this reason, the Church also is enriched when she receives the values of Judaism.** (para. 247-249)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (55) – Pope Francis tells us that evangelization must include dialogue, including **e) interreligious dialogue**. **An attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides. Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities. This dialogue is in first place a conversation about human existence We learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking**

and speaking. We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle of all our exchanges. A dialogue which seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation. (para. 250)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (56) – Pope Francis also wants a dialogue with those who do not identify themselves as followers of any particular religion. **As believers, we also feel close to those who do not consider themselves part of any religious tradition, yet sincerely seek the truth, goodness and beauty which we believe have their highest expression and source in God. We consider them as precious allies in the commitment to defending human dignity, in building peaceful coexistence between peoples and in protecting creation. "Believers and non-believers are able to engage in dialogue about fundamental issues of ethics, art and science, and about the search for transcendence." This too is a path to peace in our troubled world.** (para. 257)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (57) – For some people the idea of evangelization seems new or strange. Why evangelize? Pope Francis tells us: **The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? If we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence. . . . Jesus' whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, is precious and reveals the mystery of his divine life. Whenever we encounter this anew, we become convinced that it is exactly what others need, even though they may not recognize it: . . . We have a treasure of life and love which cannot deceive, and a message which cannot mislead or disappoint. It penetrates to the depths of our hearts, sustaining and ennobling us. It is a truth which is never out of date because it reaches that part of us which nothing else can reach. Our infinite sadness can only be cured by an infinite love.** (para 264-265)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (58) – Pope Francis points out the need to connect with other people: **To be evangelizers of souls, we need to develop a spiritual taste for being close to people's lives and to discover that this is itself a source of greater joy. Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people. When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realize that Jesus' gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people. We realize once more that he wants to make use of us to draw closer to his beloved people. He takes**

us from the midst of his people and he sends us to his people; without this sense of belonging we cannot understand our deepest identity. (para. 268)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (59) – Being Christian is not a life in which we can keep suffering at a distance: **Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is nothing else than the culmination of the way he lived his entire life. Moved by his example, we want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world. But we do so not from a sense of obligation, not as a burdensome duty, but as the result of a personal decision which brings us joy and gives meaning to our lives.** (para. 269) Sometimes we are tempted to be that kind of Christian who keeps the Lord's wounds at arm's length. Yet Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others. He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people's lives and know the power of tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people. (para. 270)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (60) – Being a Christian does not mean we can keep others at a safe distance: **Clearly Jesus does not want us to be grandees who look down upon others, but men and women of the people. This is not an idea of the Pope, or one pastoral option among others; they are injunctions contained in the word of God which are so clear, direct and convincing that they need no interpretations which might diminish their power to challenge us. . . . When we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord's greatest and most beautiful gifts. Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God. If we want to advance in the spiritual life, then, we must constantly be missionaries. The work of evangelization enriches the mind and the heart; it opens up spiritual horizons; it makes us more and more sensitive to the workings of the Holy Spirit, and it takes us beyond our limited spiritual constructs. . . . We do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in own comforts. Such a life is nothing less than slow suicide.** (para. 271)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (61) – Evangelization is not just an errand on my list of tasks; it becomes my identity. **My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off; it is not an "extra" or just another moment in life. Instead, it is**

something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. *I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing. All around us we begin to see nurses with soul, teachers with soul, politicians with soul, people who have chosen deep down to be with others and for others. But once we separate our work from our private lives, everything turns grey and we will always be seeking recognition or asserting our needs. We stop being a people.* (part. 273)
If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (62) – In a world that too often thinks about "me first," why should I devote myself to others? **If we are to share our lives with others and generously give of ourselves, we also have to realize that every person is worthy of our giving. Not for their physical appearance, their abilities, their language, their way of thinking, or for any satisfaction that we might receive, but rather because they are God's handiwork, his creation. God created that person in his image, and he or she reflects something of God's glory. Every human being is the object of God's infinite tenderness, and he himself is present in their lives. Jesus offered his precious blood on the cross for that person. Appearances notwithstanding, every person is immensely holy and deserves our love. Consequently, if I can help at least one person to have a better life, that already justifies the offering of my life. It is a wonderful thing to be God's faithful people. We achieve fulfillment when we break down walls and our heart is filled with faces and names!** (para. 274)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (63) – Pope Francis conveys his exciting experience of the resurrection and its power in the world today, and how we share in that power: **Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. On razed land life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelize are instruments of that power.** (para. 276) **The kingdom is here, it returns, it struggles to flourish anew. Christ's resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain. May we never remain on the sidelines of this march of living hope!** (para. 278)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (64) – Pope Francis comments on what we do when we get tired: **We all know from experience that sometimes a task does not bring the satisfaction we seek, results are few and changes are slow, and we are tempted to grow weary. Yet lowering our arms momentarily out of weariness is not the same as lowering them for good, overcome by chronic discontent and by a listlessness that parches the soul. It also happens that our hearts can tire of the struggle because in the end we are caught up in ourselves, in a careerism which thirsts for recognition, applause, rewards and status. In this case we do not lower our arms, but we no longer grasp what we seek, the resurrection is not there. In cases like these, the Gospel, the most beautiful message that this world can offer, is buried under a pile of excuses.** (para. 277)

Because we do not always see these seeds growing, we need an interior certainty, a conviction that God is able to act in every situation, even amid apparent setbacks. . . . No single act of love for God will be lost, no generous effort is meaningless, no painful endurance is wasted. . . . It may be that the Lord uses our sacrifices to shower blessings in another part of the world which we will never visit. The Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills; we entrust ourselves without pretending to see striking results. We know only that our commitment is necessary. Let us learn to rest in the tenderness of the arms of the Father amid our creative and generous commitment. Let us keep marching forward; let us give him everything, allowing him to make our efforts bear fruit in his good time. (para. 279)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (65) – Pope Francis speaks about his own experience of being a tired missionary: **Keeping our missionary fervor alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, for it is he who "helps us in our weakness" (Rom 8:26). But this generous trust has to be nourished, and so we need to invoke the Spirit constantly. He can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavor. It is true that this trust in the unseen can cause us to feel disoriented: it is like being plunged into the deep and not knowing what we will find. I myself have frequently experienced this. Yet there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills. The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place. This is what it means to be mysteriously fruitful!** (para. 280)

If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website.

The Joy of the Gospel (66) – Pope Francis concludes his exhortation talking about Mary under the title of *Mother of Evangelization*: **At the foot of the cross, at the supreme hour of the new creation, Christ led us to Mary. He brought us to her because he did not want us to journey without a mother, and our people read in this maternal image all the mysteries of the Gospel. . . . Mary was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling**

clothes and an abundance of love. She is the handmaid of the Father who sings his praises. She is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives. She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain. As mother of all, she is a sign of hope for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice. She is the missionary who draws near to us and accompanies us throughout life, opening our hearts to faith by her maternal love. As a true mother, she walks at our side, she shares our struggles and she constantly surrounds us with God's love. . . . Mary let herself be guided by the Holy Spirit on a journey of faith towards a destiny of service and fruitfulness. Today we look to her and ask her to help us proclaim the message of salvation to all and to enable new disciples to become evangelizers in turn. Along this journey of evangelization we will have our moments of aridity, darkness and even fatigue. Mary herself experienced these things during the years of Jesus' childhood in Nazareth. . . . Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. . . . [She] is also the one who brings a homely warmth to our pursuit of justice. . . . This interplay of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and concern for others, is what makes the ecclesial community look to Mary as a model of evangelization. (para. 285-288)

*If you want to read more commentary, or find a link to the entire document, go to the parish website. **THE END***