

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting
April 13, 2014
Evangelii Gaudium, Chapter 2
Jessica Montgomery

“Evangelii Gaudium” - given on November 24, 2013 - The Joy of the Gospel
Psalm 37: This psalm summarizes the kind of trust in God that Pope Francis is calling us to.

Do not fret...

Do not fret - it leads only to evil.

Like Psalm 37, Pope Francis is calling to a new revelation on the Christian life. Is there something in your life or in the world around you that worries you?

We see evil all around us. We see laws and pressures from the world that go against our beliefs. “Do not fret because of evil men,” Psalm 37 tells us, “or be envious of those who do wrong.” Trust in the Lord and do good, delight yourself in the Lord, and commit your way to the Lord. These phrases call us back to a place of trust in God, and move us away from a focus on the problems that surround us. In particular I’m struck by the bluntness of verse 8 - “do not fret - it leads only to evil.” Worrying actually leads to evil. The Word of God reminds us that we cannot worry and serve God at the same time.

There are so many gems in this exhortation, but rather than read it to you, I want to share with you in my own words, with what I got out of it, for me personally and for each one of us here.

Chapter 2 of *The Joy of the Gospel* discusses the evils of our world, and the temptations that we face as Christians. Facing the reality of evil can lead us in one of 2 directions: a distorted view of them, where the problems we see take on more importance and more power than the reality of the Gospel. Another view we can take is to take up residence in a cocoon, hide from the world, seek out rules and traditions to follow, and hope that Jesus comes quickly to get us! Neither of these are Christ’s way, and in *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis calls us to get out of our cocoons, and take on the evils of the world with the power that we have - the Gospel! He calls us to get our hands dirty and to let the light and grace of Christ flow to others.

We are not called to just live moral lives, and surround ourselves with other moral people, where the rules that we all follow together set us neatly apart from the rest of the world. No, we are called to live lives that witness the power and efficacy of the Gospel.

- My husband is a wonderful student and teacher of history and reminded me of how the first Christians followed Jesus and made an impact on these systemic evils of the world. Obviously, looking for worldly solutions to these problems only makes them worse. See how bodies like the United Nations have helped millions of people and yet problems like poverty, war and diseases only get worse. We need Godly solutions. The disciples of Jesus lived in the Roman Empire - a place very similar to our world today. They put their resources together and lived off of each other and took care of the needs in their community and spread the Gospel. As they did that, they brought the Gospel throughout the world. As time went on, some of them began to take important government positions, whether in politics, in the military, etc. With Godly people in positions of government, they used their power for good and found ways to alleviate suffering and bring about peace. Do you see the pattern? They put their resources together, spread the Gospel and then when some were put in positions of worldly power, they could use that power to do good on an even bigger scale. It all began with a radical commitment to take up the charge of spreading the Gospel to every available place.

- Are we committed to start there, too? I have to personalize this call from our Holy Father and make it my own, and make a difference to the people God sends me to. I have to take up the challenge that Pope Francis gives us, to do my part to make a difference in the world. To pray, to read the Word of God, to be changed, inspired, and led by the Word of God, and to build relationships with like-minded people. People who want to help others and spread the Gospel like me.

- John 6:37-38 - “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow the rivers of living water.” Out of whose heart flow the rivers of living water? Out of our heart, after we have drunk from Jesus, the Source.

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- We are nourished in the Mass, but we can't hand out the Eucharist to each person we meet, can we? But what we CAN do is bring the living Gospel, the Word of God that has power to save and set free, along with the material help that shows that our love for others is real.

- Jesus said to the Pharisees - "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham." And then he says the same about Himself - if we believe in Him, we should do the works of Jesus.

- Jesus called the Pharisees terrible names, and even told them the Devil was their father! Why? Because "You do not listen to my words," Jesus told the Pharisees. When we don't listen and let the Word of God change us, and we become attached to religious traditions and rules we think we need to follow rather than doing the works that Jesus did, we lose the whole point of Jesus' life and His sacrifice on the Cross. Following rules is not the greatest act of love. Jesus demonstrated love - lay down His life, giving Himself completely over to the Father's will for the salvation and liberation of mankind. Did he stop when it got uncomfortable? No. Did he stop when he felt offended by people's unbelief and mockery of him? No. Did he stop when others were offended? No. Did he stop when people said he was being intolerant? No. There is no stopping in sharing the joy of the Gospel. We must never stop.

It starts with hearing God's words. Jesus said: "He who is of God hears God's words." We have to be committed to hearing and receiving the Words of God, letting them spring through us to people who need to be set free.

Pope Francis writes: Yes, at times being living sources of water from which others can drink becomes a heavy cross, but it was from the cross, from his pierced side, that our Lord gave himself to us as a source of living water. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!

I know for me, worry and self-pity are my joy-stealers and the things that prevent me from sharing the Gospel effectively. Worry exalts a problem more than Christ, and self-pity implies that God doesn't care about me. Whatever it is that prevents you from sharing the Gospel, confess it as sin, confess it as a lie, and confess the truth that you are a living source of water. Living sources are always drinking and always giving. That is the cycle of our life, every day. Drinking, receiving, and giving, and drinking and receiving. Pope Francis calls out one of our challenges - he calls it the *inferiority complex* of the Christian. Basically, people in the media or in the government mock Christian beliefs or make them out to be inferior to worldly and cultured views on things. So Christians react by feeling little, feeling kind of embarrassed of their faith, so they try to fit in. Before you know it, we feel unhappy with who we are and we feel like we are barely surviving this cynical culture we are living in. And we are so self-conscious and defensive that we don't evangelize. We don't share our faith, except maybe with certain people we feel would not be offended.

Pope Francis reminds us that sharing the Gospel is a cross. It is not comfortable. It requires risk-taking. Let me tell you of a risk I took, and a risk I didn't take.

** share when I called my colleague on the phone **

** when I was to ask the man on the metro if he was saved **

It was foreign, uncomfortable to me... but only because I was self-focused rather than Christ-focused. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis exhorts us to give ourselves away. To constantly drink from the living water of Jesus - His presence and His word - and to give it away. If we were constantly giving Jesus away, do you know what joy we would experience and exude? It would be irresistible. The secret to *The Joy of the Gospel* is just that - it grows as we all become committed to taking it up personally and giving it away. We are to bear one another's burdens - not just our own burdens. That means we have weaknesses and needs that only our brothers and sisters can help us with. And that also means that we have gifts and strengths that others can only receive from us.

What is the difference between community and country club? A country club is where people who have it all together come for some recreation and a little relief from the day-to-day. A community is a place where we come with all that we are - good, bad, ugly - and we share it - rooted in our shared faith that as we give away the joy of the Gospel, God will lift us up and heal us of whatever burdens us. When we hold

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back from others, we end up choking the life and joy out of ourselves and each other. This life we have - it is not ours. It is ours to give away. And all those things we are worried about and complaining about? They are God's to provide in abundance. Have we forgotten the God we serve? Have we become so focused on holiness that we live stale, pessimistic lives?

Maybe we bought into the lie that we shouldn't "burden" others with our needs. We are family. God's family. We should be more reliant on each other than on our natural families. We should not let our zeal and our mission to spread the Gospel be overshadowed by whatever lack we feel we have. God's Word is clear about the kingdom of God. Give and it shall be given unto you. We are believers. That means we live based in what we believe. Do we believe God? Do we really believe what He says? Risk. Pope Francis reminds us that the Christian life is a risk-filled life. We are blessed to be a blessing. We are blessed. You might have a pile of bills you don't know how to pay, or a child you feel unfit to raise, or a person or problem that torments you. Yes, we all have unanswered questions. But let me tell you. You also have something that someone here needs. Something only you have that will lift up another person here. What can you give? And what can you entrust to God as an act of faith?

The joy of the Gospel is in you *to be given*. Give it away. As only you can.

We're so good at belittling ourselves: "I'm just a little guy." or "If only I had this" "if only I were married" "if only my children would comply" "if only somebody would notice me" "if only my finances looked better" "if only I lived closer" "if only my job were different".

You are chosen to partake in and share the joy of the Gospel.

Take it in. Sit at the banquet. Feast. Burp. Get full. Jesus is at the head of our banquet table. The supply of food and drink is endless. Feast on the love, the grace, the acceptance, the burden-removing power of His anointing. Look in His eyes and know that you are ok, and everything is going to be ok. He reigns. His kingdom reigns. And you and I get to live in it every day. And we get to give someone else the opportunity to live in it, too.

Let me close with a few excerpts from the exhortation:

The joy of the Gospel is such that it cannot be taken away from us by anyone or anything (cf. *Jn* 16:22). The evils of our world – and those of the Church – must not be excuses for diminishing our commitment and our fervor.

“Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort.”

While painfully aware of our own frailties, we have to march on without giving in, keeping in mind what the Lord said to Saint Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 *Cor* 12:9).

True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others.

“We cannot forget that evangelization is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel to *those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him*. Many of them are quietly seeking God, led by a yearning to see his face. All of them have a RIGHT to receive the Gospel. Christians have the DUTY to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet.

Unless these people [who are seeking God] find in the Church a spirituality which can offer healing and liberation, and fill them with life and peace, while at the same time summoning them to fraternal communion and missionary fruitfulness, they will end up by being taken in by solutions which neither make life truly human nor give glory to God.

Finally, I want to close with this, a shout-out to the young and old among us:

“Whenever we attempt to read the signs of the times it is helpful to listen to young people and the elderly. Both represent a source of hope for every people. The elderly bring with them memory and the wisdom of experience, which warns us not to foolishly repeat our past mistakes. Young people call us to renewed and expansive hope, for they represent new directions for humanity and open us up to the future, lest we cling to a nostalgia for structures and customs which are no longer life-giving in today's world.”