

UNITY  HOPE
POPE FRANCIS SINGAPORE 2024

A JOYFUL JOURNEY with *Pope Francis*

Exploring Twelve Pivotal Documents
as a 12-week group formation series

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In anticipation of His Holiness Pope Francis' visit to Singapore, The Office for the New Evangelisation (ONE) and the Catholic Theological Institute of Singapore (CTIS) have adapted *A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis* by Fr. James Kroeger, MM, into a group formation resource. In this resource, Fr. James has summarised twelve of Pope Francis' key documents.

These materials are designed to attract readers to explore the profound insights of Pope Francis. They seek to faithfully capture his thought and lead to an understanding and appreciation of his wisdom. We hope that by learning about these documents over the twelve sessions, you will come to know the vision and apostolic direction of Pope Francis.

This resource is designed for use by parish ministries, small Christian communities, and ecclesial communities, amongst others. Let us gather in our groups and prepare our minds and hearts to welcome Pope Francis to our shores!

ONE and CTIS are grateful to Fr. James Kroeger, MM for giving us permission to use his content in this group formation resource.



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FOREWORD

The coming visit of Pope Francis is a good reminder of what it means to be part of the Catholic Church. The characteristics of the Church are one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) in number 866-870 explains:

The Church is one: she acknowledges one Lord, confesses one faith, is born of one baptism, forms one body, is given life by one Spirit, for the sake of one hope.

The Church is holy: the Most Holy God is her author; Christ her bridegroom, gave Himself up to make her holy; the spirit of holiness gives her life.

The Church is catholic: she proclaims the fullness of the faith. She bears in herself and administers the totality of the means of salvation. She is sent out to all peoples, speaks to all men and encompasses all times.

The Church is apostolic: She is built on a lasting foundation that is the twelve apostles of the Lamb ... Christ governs her through Peter and the other apostles, who are present in their successors, the Pope and the College of bishops.

The Catholic Theological Institute of Singapore and the Office for the New Evangelisation are grateful to Fr. James Kroeger for granting us the permission to publish his book, *A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis*. The collected works of the magisterium in this book will assist Catholics to understand the origin, nature and mission of the Church. I encourage our Catholics to read the book and even to use it for their group discussions as part of the spiritual preparation for the coming visit of Pope Francis.

Mgsr. James Yeo Phd, STL

Rector, Catholic Theological Institute of Singapore



How to Use THIS RESOURCE

This resource consists of 12 chapters covering the 12 key documents of Pope Francis. Gather with your ministry/community/family once a week to go through one chapter at a time.

A different group facilitator can take the responsibility in each session to foster good interaction and to keep time.

The duration of each session is about two hours.

The time and place for the next sharing should be announced at the end of each session.

SESSION FORMAT

Opening Prayer

Everyone will pray the opening prayer together to foster a spirit of reflection and openness to Pope Francis' writings, and to one another.



Summary

The facilitator will read the summary out loud. You may decide to have each member take turns to read each paragraph. While going through the text, take note of the words, phrases, or sentences that stood out to you.



Reflection Questions

The facilitator should read the reflection question out loud. Allow time to reflect on these questions and also time for everyone to respond. The group should reflect and share on the first question before moving onto the next.



Prayer Prompt

The session ends with a Prayer Prompt to be prayed by everyone taking turns in the group.



Scripture Verse to Commit to Memory

To quote St. Jerome, "Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ". Therefore, as a group, commit the assigned scripture verse to memory.

FACILITATING GROUP REFLECTION

For where two or three
meet in my name, I am
there with them

MATTHEW 18:20

Be mindful of Christ's presence. Adopt a humble and reverent manner when speaking or acting within the group. Read the text meditatively and give your best attention to the words of the Scripture readings.

May they all be one,
just as, Father, you are
in me and I am in you -

JOHN 17:21

Help everyone to feel at home and take special care to welcome newcomers. Treat each person as a beloved member of the community and invite one another to participate in the session by taking turns to read the text. Use a language that everyone can understand so that no one feels left out.

...and their great men
make their authority
felt. Among you this is
not to happen

MARK 10:42-43

Avoid being authoritative or domineering by acting aggressively, flaunting knowledge or telling others what to do. If there is advice to be given, do so after the reflection is done. Choose words that are easily understood by all when speaking. Avoid giving lengthy sharing that consume other people's opportunities to offer their sharing.

If anyone wants to be a
follower of mine, let him
renounce himself and
take up his cross every
day and follow me -

LUKE 9:23

At the core of these reflections is the Word of God, the teachings of the Church and the invitation for our conversion towards Christ. If the group wanders away from this during the session, gently invite one another to re-focus.

Because when the time
comes, the Holy Spirit
will teach you what you
should say

LUKE 12:12

There is no need to prepare your sharing in advance or to appoint people to share. Wait patiently for God's Spirit to inspire generosity and remember to give thanks after someone volunteers to contribute their own faith experience.

...your light must shine in
people's sight, so that, on
seeing your good works,
they may give praise to
your Father in heaven -

MATTHEW 5:16

These reflections challenge us to do the will of God - to reflect the love of Christ to others we meet. Spend some time at the start of the next group session sharing with one another how each one has tried to do this over the past week.

Understanding TYPES OF PAPAL DOCUMENTS

Catholics acknowledge that God endowed on the Apostle Peter and his successors a lasting and supreme authority to lead Christ's faithful on earth. As the successor to the ministry of Peter, the pope — in his own person and together with all the bishops — sets the tone for the Church to continue Christ's mission to bring God's Good News to all.

Teaching and governing the Church are primary aspects of the papacy, not to mention other work related to also being a head-of-state. Throughout the centuries, popes have exercised their leadership directly by writing to those in the Church and others.

Here are some types of papal writing:

1. Apostolic Constitutions are solemn documents possessing a legislative character, which are used by the pope to promulgate or modify laws, teachings, or structures within the Church. E.g. *Munificentissimus Deus* (Pius XII, 1950) defined the dogma of the Assumption of Mary.



2. Papal Encyclicals are lengthy letters often addressed to the entire Christian faithful that focus on a topic the pope wishes to catechise on. Encyclicals are often teaching documents. E.g. *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015) which called for Christians to care for the natural environment.

3. Apostolic Exhortations are pastoral letters usually written following a Synod of Bishops in which the pope synthesises the discussions and conclusions to express the fruits of the synod. E.g. *Christifideles Laici* (John Paul II, 1988) on the vocation of the lay faithful. On occasion, the pope can issue an apostolic exhortation without a synod.

4. Apostolic Letters can address a wide range of purposes to particular groups within the Church or to the whole faithful in general depending on the circumstances. E.g. *Ubiquumque et Semper* (Benedict XVI, 2010) established the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation.

5. Motu proprio is a descriptor of the way a papal letter is issued. If a letter or a rescript, which is a response to a petition, is given *motu proprio* (by one's own impulse) it means that the pope has taken his own initiative to exercise papal authority on a certain matter. Decrees to amend ecclesial discipline or announcements of personnel appointments are often issued this way. E.g. *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (Francis, 2023) established procedures for safeguarding against abuse in the Church.

Familiarity with papal writings is highly recommended for Catholics who wish to be informed. Access to the pope's writings, past and present, is made easy today with the internet. It is not only important to read and understand *what* a pope writes, but also *how*. The tone of papal writings intentionally conveys a significant part of what a pope wishes to teach! **Happy reading!**



miserando atque eligendo
chosen through mercy

Introduction

Popes have many titles, some classical, others popular. Of the classical appellations, Pope Francis would probably prefer “Servant of the servants of God”. From the wide range of popular titles, he might choose “pope of mercy”. He has incorporated this virtue into his papal motto: *miserando atque eligendo*, chosen through mercy. One constantly witnesses mercy through Francis’ many actions and documents. In fact, he has asserted that Jesus is “mercy made flesh,” born of the “Mother of Mercy” (MV 24).

Our merciful pope is now entering his twelfth year of guiding the People of God, having been elected on March 13, 2013. Recalling this milestone, this short booklet presents brief glimpses into twelve pivotal documents of the Francis pontificate. This writer is profoundly aware that no summaries can substitute for the rich depths of the full documents; these presentations are no more than enticements, appetisers, or inducements to savour Francis’ profound wisdom and insights.

A quick glance at the table of contents will reveal the twelve documents found in this booklet; they are listed along with the

descriptive title of each of the twelve chapters. Readers will note that the numbers found in parentheses after a quoted section in the text refer to the paragraphs of the original documents written by Pope Francis; these references will enable an interested person to easily locate the original text.

It is the sincere desire of this author that readers will see these materials as a kind of “road-map” to find and explore the rich treasures found in the corpus of Pope Francis’ writings. Hopefully, it will prove to be a “joyful journey”, an “enriching discovery”, and a “rewarding pilgrimage”! Kindly note that at the end of each chapter there are “reflection questions” for personal or group use as well as a “prayer prompt” to initiate individual or shared prayer and commitment.

Finally, everyone will find Pope Francis to be a master teacher and a trustworthy guide, leading to a deeper “Christ-encounter”. Let us often recall Francis’ heartfelt exhortation: “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” (*Evangelii Gaudium* 3).

Lumen Fidei

WALKING IN THE LIGHT OF FAITH

In faith, Christ is not simply the one in whom we believe, the supreme manifestation of God's love; He is also the one with whom we are united precisely in order to believe. Faith does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus himself sees them, with His own eyes: it is a participation in His way of seeing.

LUMEN FIDEI 18

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the gift of our dear shepherd, Pope Francis. As we embark on this joyful journey, open our minds and hearts to his wisdom, mercy, teaching, and love. Remain with us on this journey, and through the writings of Pope Francis, may we enter into a deeper relationship with You and live our faith more radically. Amen.

SUMMARY

Lumen Fidei (LF), *The Light of Faith*, is Pope Francis' first encyclical. Francis admits that Pope Benedict XVI "had almost completed a first draft of an encyclical on faith" and for this initial work "I am deeply grateful to him". Here we have a unique treasure: profound reflections on faith from two popes!

As one reads, it becomes clear that Pope Benedict had the major input into this document. It harmonises well with the vision Pope Benedict outlined in his proclamation of 2012 as a "year of faith," recalling the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

Brief Overview

The structure of *Lumen Fidei* is simple and direct, containing an introduction and four chapters; it concludes with Marian reflections. The Introduction shows how ancients viewed faith; it narrates how the Second Vatican Council, a "Council on faith" sought to bring faith into the contemporary world. Francis writes: "The Second

Vatican Council enabled the light of faith to illumine our human experience from within, accompanying the men and women of our time on their journey" (6).

Faith Foundations

Chapter One shows that we believe in a God of mercy and how Christians can "see with the eyes of Jesus and share in his mind" (21). "Faith opens the way before us and accompanies our steps through time. Hence, if we want to understand what faith is, we need to follow the route it has taken, the path trodden by believers" (8). "Believing means entrusting oneself to a merciful love which always accepts and pardons" (13).

In Chapter Two, Francis portrays the close link between faith and truth. He asserts: "Faith transforms the whole person precisely to the extent that he or she becomes open to love" (26). "Christian faith, inasmuch as it proclaims the truth of God's total love and opens us to the power of that love, penetrates to the core of our human experience" (32).

Contemporary Faith

The importance of evangelisation and the transmission of faith are central themes of Chapter Three. The communication of the gift of faith must be fostered in every age. “It is through an unbroken chain of witnesses that we come to see the face of Jesus” (38). Indeed, “the Church, like every family, passes on to her children the whole store of her memories” (40). For Francis, “the sacramental character of faith finds its highest expression in the Eucharist” (44).

Finally, in Chapter Four, Francis explains the link between faith and the common good. The Pope writes: “Precisely because it is linked to love (cf. Gal 5:6), the light of faith is concretely placed at the service of justice, law, and peace” (51). Faith enables us to share the gaze of Jesus and thus accompany the poor and suffering in our world.

Living the Faith

Pope Francis concludes his encyclical with some inspiring reflections on Mary’s pilgrimage of faith (cf. 60). He prays: “Mother, help our faith! ... Help us to entrust ourselves fully to him [Jesus] and to believe in his love, especially at times of trial, beneath the shadow of the cross, when our faith is called to mature”.

The entire encyclical strikes a positive note as it unfolds how people through the centuries have lived their faith (e.g. Abraham, Moses, Saint Paul, Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and the Virgin Mary). Faith, indeed, is a special gift that we pray may be granted to us, making us living icons of faith to others in the contemporary world.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ✦ Who has been a powerful “faith witness” in my life? How did this person concretely manifest his/her faith? Give some specific examples.
- ✦ Apart from attending Mass and participating in church activities, in what other ways can I express my faith?

PRAYER PROMPT

Lord, help us to be true
“faith witnesses” by ...



SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

... for we walk by faith, not by sight.
2 Corinthians 5:7

Evangelii Gaudium

LIVING IN GOSPEL JOY

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 unflinchingly 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 realise that He is already there, waiting for us with open arms.

EVANGELII GAUDIUM 3

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, You sent Your Son to earth to reveal Your love for us. Before He ascended to You, He commissioned the Apostles to share the gospel with the world. Today, this responsibility falls onto us. As we read the summary for *Evangelii Gaudium*, ignite in our hearts a desire to be a missionary disciples. Amen.

SUMMARY

Evangelii Gaudium (EG), *The Joy of the Gospel [2013]*, Pope Francis' first apostolic exhortation, is lengthy, reaching over 50,000 words. Here Francis is proposing a profound missionary renewal of the entire Church, desiring a truly vibrant, evangelising community aflame with the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Francis says: "I dream of a 'missionary option,' that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything" (27). He asserts: "All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion" (27). He believes: "Missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity" (15).

Pope Francis' Vision

One may validly assert that this document summarises the pope's theology, spirituality, and vision of pastoral-missionary ministry. His desire that the Church be "permanently in a state of mission" (25) comes from his deep personal relationship with Christ and he invites "all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ" (3).

A pivotal insight of Francis is that "we are all missionary disciples" (119); "we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries,' but rather that we are always 'missionary

disciples'" (120). "Missionary disciples accompany missionary disciples" (173). Evangelisers' lives must "glow with fervour" since they have received "the joy of Christ" (10).

Attracting Others

Pope Francis reveals a sense of humour at several points. He notes that unfortunately, "there are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter" (6). "An evangeliser must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral" (10). We must not become "querulous and disillusioned pessimists, 'sourpusses'" (85).

In EG, Pope Francis makes following Jesus as his disciple an attractive invitation; this holds true because "being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (8); cf. Benedict XVI.

Francis recognises numerous mission challenges; yet, he remains realistically optimistic, asserting: "Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigour" (109)!

Ten Missionary Signposts

Evangelii Gaudium overflows with profound wisdom for Christian living and witness; this author now identifies pivotal, thematic insights which will contribute to renewing the missionary fervour of the Church.

1. Missionaries as Christ-centred Persons. Mission demands a “personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus”. The primary reason for evangelising is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him” (264).

2. Joy as Pivotal Sign of Missionary Disciples. Joyful evangelisers will contribute to a successful propagation of the Gospel. With heartfelt emotion, Pope Francis writes: “I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelisation marked by this joy” (1).

3. Integrating Vatican II Perspectives. Francis asserts that “it is important to draw out the pastoral consequences of the Council’s teaching” (38) for worldwide mission today.

4. Centrality of Mission in Church Life. Francis constantly promotes an active missionary Church; as noted earlier, he proclaims that “missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church’s activity” (15).

5. A Dynamic, Outgoing Church. “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” (49).

Additional Signposts

6. Mercy is Central. “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” (114).

7. Social Involvement in Evangelisation. “Our faith in Christ, who became poor ... is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members” (186).

8. Popular Piety, a Vehicle of Evangelisation. “Popular piety enables us to see how the faith, once received, becomes embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on” (123).

9. Dialogue in Evangelisation. Within a larger section on dialogue, Francis discusses both ecumenical dialogue (244-249) and interreligious dialogue (250-254).

10. World-wide Vision. Undoubtedly, Pope Francis exhibits a broad vision of an evangelising, collegial, and synodal Church, citing insights from numerous episcopal conferences from all across the world.

Sincere Invitation

Francis has issued a call for a missionary renewal of our Church; he is echoing the Second Vatican Council, which asserted that “the pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature” (*Ad Gentes 2*). Let us joyfully heed Francis’ heartfelt, personal invitation to become truly alive in mission!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ✦ In what ways have you observed evangelisation being carried out in Singapore, while maintaining and respecting religious harmony?
- ✦ How do you see yourself as a “missionary disciple” in your present context? What factors could rob us of our missionary vigour?

PRAYER PROMPT

Jesus, we want to be Your “missionary disciples” through our ...



SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Matthew 28:19

Misericordiae Vultus

PROCLAIMING GOD'S BOUNDLESS MERCY

We need to constantly contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.

MISERICORDIAE VULTUS 2

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Your Son was the Face of Your Mercy. He had a great love for the last, the lost, and the least. As we reflect on *Misericordiae Vultus*, please shape our hearts and minds, and may we follow in Jesus' example and show Your Mercy to all whom we come into contact with. Amen.

SUMMARY

A vast amount of “mercy material” from Pope Francis is available; however, probably the best source is Francis’ 2015 document, *Misericordiae Vultus [MV] (The Face of Mercy)*, wherein he proclaimed an entire year of mercy (2015–2016) to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the close of Vatican Council II (1965).

Summons to Compassion

Francis, the “Pope of Mercy,” says: “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace ... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man” (2). Francis calls Christians to a renewed practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (cf. 15). “Let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy” (15).

Our daily “living-in-mercy” is a duty for every Christian; it is not optional. Mercy is challenging; it is not easy. The demands of mercy are often inconvenient and unpredictable; they impinge on our personal plans and schedules. We cannot calculate when mercy will be demanded of us.

God, Father of Mercy

Francis notes that when mercy is shown it brings deep joy to God’s heart. Scripture clearly affirms that God is “the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation” (2 Cor 1:3). Our God is “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4) and dives in *misericordia*. One of Jesus’ well-known parables is that of the “merciful father” (though often known as the parable of the prodigal son): Luke 15:11–32. The magnanimous father shows his overflowing love, mercy and compassion to *both* of his sons. The parable reveals the overflowing mercy and tenderness of the compassionate father.

Jesus, Face of the Father’s Mercy

Francis has written: “Mercy finds its most noble and complete expression in the Incarnate Word. Jesus reveals the face of the Father who is rich in mercy”. In Jesus of Nazareth, mercy has become living and visible. Jesus’ entire life and “His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously ... The signs He works, especially in the face of sinners, the poor, the marginalised, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in Him speaks of mercy. Nothing in Him is devoid of compassion” (8).

Jesus often “felt deep compassion” for the crowds (Matt 9:36). He is moved with merciful compassion when He sees needy people. His mercy overflows when He invites Matthew, the tax collector, to follow Him; He looked at Matthew with merciful love and chose him: *miserando atque eligendo* [Francis’ episcopal motto] (Matt 9:9). Jesus spoke many parables devoted to mercy: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons (Luke 15:4-7, 8-10, 11-32).

Church, Community of Mercy

“Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love ... The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy” (10-11). “The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person” (12).

Christians, Missionaries of God’s Mercy

Pope Francis frequently emphasises the theme of mercy, noting that God’s merciful love “is witnessed to by many men and women of every age and condition”. Francis asserts that God’s

mercy “is all the more necessary when we consider how many injustices, wars, and humanitarian crises still need resolution”. Francis frequently reminds priests (and all of us): “For the love of Jesus Christ, never tire of being merciful! ... Have mercy, great mercy!”

Mary, Mother of Mercy

Pope Francis notes in *Misericordiae Vultus*: “My thoughts now turn to the Mother of Mercy ... No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh ... She treasured divine mercy in her heart ... Her hymn of praise (Luke 1:46-55) was dedicated to the mercy of God ... At the foot of the cross, Mary, together with John, the disciple of love, witnessed the words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus. This supreme expression of mercy towards those who crucified Him shows us the point to which the mercy of God can reach” (24).

Conclusion

Pope Francis’ Prayer for the Jubilee of Mercy sums up his vision: “Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father ... You are the face of the invisible Father, the God who manifests His power above all by forgiveness and mercy. Let Your Church be Your visible face in the world”.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

✦ Can you name one or two Church saints who could be called a “saint of mercy”? Briefly narrate his/her life story. From your own life experience, describe someone you know who is a true model of mercy and compassion.

✦ How do I think God feels as He looks at me? Can I accept His patient and merciful gaze?

PRAYER PROMPT

Dear Mary, “Mother of Mercy”,
we want to show mercy by ...



SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

*And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors*
Matthew 6:12

Laudato Si'

TREASURING OUR COMMON HOME

It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.

LAUDATO SI' 217

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, through Adam, You assigned humanity to be stewards of Your creation. This is a responsibility that we have forgotten, and our earth is now suffering as a result. As we learn about *Laudato Si'*, may we be reminded of our roles as stewards of our common home. Amen.

SUMMARY

Pope Francis has written a lengthy encyclical focused solely on the environment: *Laudato Si' (LS), On Care for Our Common Home*. Boldly, Francis argues that the environment is in crisis; he issues an urgent call to action. He pointedly asks: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (160).

Recalling the beautiful canticle of Francis of Assisi, the pope notes that the earth, our sister, “now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her” (2). “I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (3). Throughout the six numbered chapters of *Laudato Si'*, [summarised in six paragraphs below], Francis calls for “a global ecological conversion,” asserting that “authentic human development has a moral character” (5) and that we need “an integral ecology” (11).

1. What is Happening to Our Common Home? Straight forwardly, Francis asserts: “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” (21). “These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture” (22). We have “a very solid scientific consensus” that sees that the cause is “mainly as a result of human activity” (23). Some key issues are: water (27-31), loss of biodiversity (32-42), decline in the quality of human life (43-47), global inequality (48-52), and weak responses (53-59). Thus, we need to take a “frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair” (61).

2. Gospel of Creation. Francis sees “the rich contribution which religions can make towards an integral ecology and the full development of humanity” (62). The pope provides some insights: “We are not God. The earth was here before us, and it has been given to us ... to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations” (67). “The work of the Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but at the same time she must above all protect humankind from self-destruction” (79). We see “the earth is essentially a shared inheritance” (93) and “everything is related” (92). We need a sense of “deep communion with the rest of nature” (91), adopting “the gaze of Jesus” (96-100).

3. Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis.

Pope Francis believes that “a certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us” (101). Thus, there is a need to examine “the dominant technocratic paradigm” as well as “the place of human beings and of human action in the world” (101). We “need to slow down and look at reality in a different way” (114). “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities—it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected” (117). “A technology severed from ethics will not easily be able to limit its own power” (136).

4. Integral Ecology.

Francis suggests that we now “consider some elements of an integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions” (137). “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental” (139). Ecology must influence all of daily life (147-155). “The principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters” (158).

“The notion of the common good also extends to future generations” (159) [inter-generational justice]. “We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity” (160). Integral ecology is a foundational principle!

5. Lines of Approach and Action.

Francis next seeks “to outline the major paths of dialogue which can help us escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us” (163). “Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan” (164). “What is needed is a politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis” (197). Religions must continue in dialogue with science (199-201).

6. Ecological Education and Spirituality.

“A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal” (202). It must address “a consumerist lifestyle” (204). An “ecological conversion” is essential (216-221). Pope Francis believes there is hope, while admitting that his reflection is “both joyful and troubling” (246). Francis asks each of us to join him in promoting an “integral ecology”.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ✦ How can you respond to the invitation to live a simpler lifestyle?
- ✦ What are your personal, concrete initiative to foster ecological responsibility? How can one's faith contribute to care for the earth, our common home?

PRAYER PROMPT

St. Francis of Assisi, I promise to care for our “common home” by ...



SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

*The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world,
and all who live in it.*

Psalm 24:1

Amoris Laetitia

SPREADING THE JOY OF LOVE

The Lord's presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. Living in a family makes it hard for us to feign or lie; we cannot hide behind a mask. If that authenticity is inspired by love, then the Lord reigns there, with His joy and His peace. The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures. In that variety of gifts and encounters which deepen communion, God has His dwelling place.

AMORIS LAETITIA 315

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, in Your wisdom, You gave us families to be our first “schools of love”. Today, families are beset on all sides by immense challenges. Regardless of our state in life, may *Amoris Laetitia* be a source of wisdom for us and teach us how to journey with families who need to encounter Your grace and love. Amen.

SUMMARY

Pope Francis has given an extraordinary gift to the Church: *Amoris Laetitia* (AL), *The Joy of Love*. This document focuses on the family and love. Francis draws heavily on the 2014 and 2015 world-wide Bishops' Synods on the Family; he enriches the discussion with his own pastoral insights.

Exploring the Treasures of *Amoris Laetitia*

Pope Francis himself provides an overview of the document. Various chapters examine (1) Scripture, (2) situation of families today, (3) Church teaching on marriage and the family, (4) love in marriage, (5) fruitful love, (6) pastoral approaches, (7) education of children, (8) Jesus' demands, and (9) family spirituality. Each chapter is a treasure-house of deep insight and wisdom!

Merciful Pastoral Tone

Pope Francis' letter sets an important pastoral agenda for the entire Church. He does not change any Church teaching, but he expresses his pastoral wisdom by always emphasising mercy and compassion. He says: "I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while expressing her objective teaching, 'always does what good she can, even if in the process,

her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street'" (308). In all situations, "the Church is commissioned to proclaim the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel" (309).

Biblical Perspectives

The first chapter of *The Joy of Love* begins with a meditation on Psalm 128, a reading frequently chosen for both Jewish and Christian wedding liturgies: "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table ... May you see your children's children"! The family is "the place where children are brought up in the faith" (16). "Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth" (30).

Jesus and Families

"The Bible is full of families, births, love stories, and family crises" (8). In fact, "Jesus himself was born into a modest family"; [He] "visits the home of Peter, whose mother-in-law was ill ... He goes to the homes of tax collectors like Matthew and Zacchaeus ... and speaks to sinners like the woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee ... He is also sensitive to the embarrassment caused by the lack of wine at a wedding feast" (21).

Challenges to Families Today

Pope Francis explores the current situation of families. He focuses on “concrete realities” in order to improve the Church’s pastoral response because he believes “the welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church” (31). Families face many challenges; some examples are: migration, the “throw-away” culture, the anti-birth mentality, lack of housing and employment, pornography, and the abuse of minors (cf. 39-56). Francis always asks the Church to “offer a word of truth and hope” (57).

Facing Actual Situations

The Church does well “to focus on concrete realities, since ‘the call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history’” (31). Migration needs to be faced because of “its negative effects on family life” (46). Some families may have a member who requires special care. Francis notes: “Families who lovingly accept the difficult trial of a child with special needs are greatly to be admired” (47). The Church seeks to help “families living in dire poverty and great limitations” (49).

Family Ministry Approaches

After reviewing the many contemporary challenges to family life, Pope Francis recommends a re-thinking of the approaches of the Church relative to marriage and

family life. For Francis, it is not enough to stress “doctrinal, bioethical, and moral issues”; the Church must encourage “openness to grace” and “present marriage as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfillment. ... We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (37).

Family: Sanctuary of Life

In a strongly worded section, Pope Francis presents his convictions about the sanctity of human life. “Here I feel it urgent to state that, if the family is the sanctuary of life, the place where life is conceived and cared for, it is a horrendous contradiction when it becomes a place where life is rejected and destroyed. So great is the value of a human life, and so inalienable is the right to life of an innocent child growing in the mother’s womb, that no alleged right to one’s own body can justify a decision to terminate that life, which is an end in itself and which can never be considered the ‘property’ of another human being. The family protects human life in all its stages, including its last” (83).

Conclusion

This presentation highlights only a few significant insights from *The Joy of Love*, useful for your meditation, enrichment, and prayer. A reflective reading of Pope Francis’ original text will certainly prove wonderfully rewarding!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ✦ Asian families do not typically express affection in sentimental ways. What other ways do they show genuine love?
- ✦ What are some concrete instances in your family that manifested genuine love and faith? How, in specific ways, might we serve struggling families?

PRAYER PROMPT

Lord, we promise to spread the true “joy of love” by ...



SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

*This is my commandment, that you love one another
as I have loved you.*

John 15:12

Gaudete et Exsultate

REJOICING IN GLADNESS - ALWAYS

There can be any number of theories about what constitutes holiness, with various explanations and distinctions. Such reflection may be useful, but nothing is more enlightening than turning to Jesus' words and seeing His way of teaching the truth. Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when He gave us the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are like a Christian's identity card. So if anyone asks: "What must one do to be a good Christian?", the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount.

GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE 63

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are all called to be holy as You are holy. Today, this call seems more difficult than ever to live up to this call these days. As we read about *Gaudete et Exsultate*, may we learn how we can better strive for holiness, and in doing so, bring others to come to know You, to love and serve You. Amen.

SUMMARY

Gaudete et Exsultate (GE) is the third Apostolic Exhortation issued by Pope Francis, following *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) and *Amoris Laetitia* (2016). It is a call to holiness of life, clearly echoing the universal call to holiness found in Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* chapter five; it is dated March 19, 2018, the feast of Saint Joseph, the fifth anniversary of his inauguration as pope in 2013.

Introduction

Gaudete et Exsultate (GE) is meant to be very practical; it is not intended to be a total synthesis of holiness or spirituality today. Its title emerges from scripture, specifically Matthew 5:12, where Jesus advises his disciples to “rejoice and be glad”—even in the midst of life’s trials. Francis notes: “My modest goal is to re-propose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time” (2). The Lord “wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence” (1).

The Call to Holiness

There are many forms of holiness, and in our holiness pilgrimage, “we are in the company of the great saints, martyrs, and witnesses who sustain us in our journey” (4). “We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness” (11). Francis praises what he

calls “the middle class of holiness” (7); this includes parents, workers, sick/elderly, grandparents. Holiness is often found “in our next-door neighbours” (7). A simple norm is: “Each in his or her own way” (11). “For God’s life is communicated to some in one way and to others in another” (11). “This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures” (16). We “need only find a more perfect way of doing what we are already doing” (17). “A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness” (19). “You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission” (23). “Life does not have a mission, but is a mission” (27). Francis quotes the words of Leon Bloy: “The only great tragedy in life is not to become a saint” (34).

Two Subtle Enemies of Holiness

Pope Francis mentions two false forms of holiness that “can lead us astray” (35): gnosticism (belief that salvation can be achieved through “special knowledge”) and *pelagianism* (belief that we can attain salvation through our own human efforts) (35). He quotes Saint Bonaventure who pointed out that “true Christian wisdom can never be separated from mercy towards our neighbour” (46). We must constantly recall that “our life is essentially a gift” (55).

Following Jesus

The third chapter centres on the example of Jesus, specifically on the Beatitudes and Matthew 25:31–46 (Last Judgement narrative). “The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card” (63). Yes, we radically defend “the innocent unborn,” but “equally sacred ... are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection” (101). “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life” (105).

Five Signs of Holiness

First, there is **perseverance, patience and meekness**. Secondly, one needs **joy** and a **sense of humour**, because “ill humour is no sign of holiness” (126). Thirdly, **boldness** and **passion** are needed. “Holiness is *parrhesia*; it is boldness, an impulse to evangelise...” (129). “Boldness and apostolic courage are an essential part of mission” (131). “The Church needs passionate missionaries” (138).

Two additional manifestations of holiness are: **community** and **constant prayer**. “Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others” (141); it is “made

up of small everyday things” (143). “Moments spent alone with God are also necessary; ... this is true not only for a privileged few, but for all of us” (149). Francis notes the centrality of the Eucharist (157).

Spiritual Combat, Vigilance and Discernment

“The Christian life is a constant battle. We need strength and courage to withstand the temptations of the devil and to proclaim the Gospel” (158). We have been given “powerful weapons” to assist us in our battle: “faith-filled prayer, meditation on the Word of God, the celebration of Mass, Eucharistic adoration, sacramental Reconciliation, works of charity, community life, missionary outreach” (162). Francis bluntly states that discernment “is a gift which we must implore” (166). Discernment is about “recognising how we can better accomplish the mission” (174). “God asks everything of us, yet He also gives everything to us” (175).

Final Invocation

Francis invokes Mother Mary, “the saint among the saints” (176). Thus, we must constantly turn to Mother Mary, “because she lived the Beatitudes of Jesus as none other. ... Our converse with her consoles, frees, and sanctifies us. ... All we need to do is whisper, time and time again: ‘Hail Mary...’” (176).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ✦ After learning about *Gaudete et Exsultate*, has your understanding of holiness changed? How so?
- ✦ Who are some persons in your life who manifested “everyday holiness”? Why is “quiet time” necessary to make progress in holiness?

PRAYER PROMPT

Jesus, assist us to integrate “everyday holiness” by in our lives ...



SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

You shall be holy, for I am holy.

1 Peter 1: 16

Christus Vivit

JOURNEYING WITH TODAY'S YOUTH

The Gospel is for everyone, not just for some. ... Do not be afraid to go and bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society, even to those who seem farthest away and most indifferent.

The Lord seeks all; He wants everyone to feel the warmth of His mercy and His love. He invites us to be fearless missionaries wherever we are and in whatever company we find ourselves: in our neighbourhoods, in school or sports or social life, in volunteer service or in the workplace. Wherever we are, we always have an opportunity to share the joy of the Gospel. That is how the Lord goes out to meet everyone.

CHRISTUS VIVIT 177

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the gift of the young people. They are the present and future of the Church. May their faith continue to grow vibrant and strong, inspiring all of us. As we delve into Christus Vivit, open our minds and hearts to understand the unique challenges and opportunities faced by our youth. Grant us the sensitivity to listen to their needs and desires, and the grace to support and nurture their spiritual journeys. Amen.

SUMMARY

Pope Francis marked the feast of the Annunciation in 2019 by releasing his apostolic exhortation *Christus Vivit* (CV), Christ Lives; it is the fruit of listening and discerning during the October 2018 Synod of Bishops, focused on the theme: “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment”.

Structure

The inviting document is presented in nine chapters, roughly corresponding to the pastoral method of “see, judge, act” or, in the framework of the Asian bishops, “dialogue, discernment, deeds”. Succinctly presented, the first three chapters present “observations” (scriptural, theological, sociological); the middle three chapters offer an “assessment” (spiritual, developmental, generational); and the final three chapters focus on “action” (pastoral, missionary, synodal). Taken together, *Christus Vivit* constitutes a *magna carta* for youth and pastoral ministry.

Christological Emphasis

Several rich themes emerge from a comprehensive review of this lengthy document. There is a clear emphasis on Christ; Francis asserts: “Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way He brings youth to our world. The very first words, then, that I would like to say to every young Christian are these: Christ is alive and He wants you to be alive” (1).

Personal Relationship

“He [Christ] is in you; He is with you and He never abandons you. However far you may wander, He is always there, the Risen One. He calls you and He waits for you to return to Him and start over again. When you feel you are growing old out of sorrow, resentment or fear, doubt or failure, He will always be there to restore your strength and your hope” (2). The Church should not be “excessively caught up in herself, but instead, and above all, reflect Jesus Christ” (39). “In Jesus, all the young [indeed everyone] can see themselves” (31).

Church: An Open Community

What vision of the Church emerges in *Christus Vivit*? Pope Francis explores the relationship between the young and the entire People of God, both pastors and faithful. There is not a separate “Church of the young” or a “Church with the young and for the young”. There exists a single community, the Church — and the young are living and creative members of this one body.

Synodal Church

Pope Francis emphasises the importance of synodality (walking together) in the Church. All segments of the Church (young, old, lay, ordained, religious, married, etc.) are to collaborate in building a better future. Francis also speaks on specific issues. For example, he

invites the entire Church to reach out to migrants, following a balanced approach to this often-divisive issue. He also encourages young people through media to share the beauty of their own personal experience of encounter with Christ, an important avenue for building up Christ's Church.

Gospel Insights

Francis explores Scripture in this pastoral letter, written "with great affection" (3). He writes: "In the Gospel of Matthew, we find a young man (Matt 19:20-22) who approaches Jesus and asks if there is more that he can do; in this, he demonstrates that youthful openness of spirit which seeks new horizons and great challenges. Yet, his spirit was really not that young, for he had already become attached to riches and comforts. He said he wanted something more, but when Jesus asked him to be generous and distribute his goods, he realised that he could not let go of everything he had. ... He had given up his youth" (18). Matthew's Gospel (25:1-13) also "speaks about a group of wise young women, who were ready and waiting, while others were distracted and slumbering". The Pope notes: "We can, in fact, spend our youth being distracted, skimming the surface of life, half-asleep, incapable of

cultivating meaningful relationships or experiencing the deeper things in life. In this way, we can store up a paltry and unsubstantial future. Or we can spend our youth aspiring to beautiful and great things, and thus store up a future full of life and interior richness" (19).

Concluding Reflections

Presented in a unique style expressive of closeness, frankness, simplicity, tenderness, and warmth, Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* is eliciting our personal response. With pastoral boldness, Francis is inviting all in the Church to become a serving Church, one that is not silent or afraid to speak about pivotal issues facing the world today; this means fostering a humble community, one that listens, particularly to the insights of the youth.

Francis asks all to turn to Mary as "the supreme model for a youthful Church that seeks to follow Christ with enthusiasm and docility" (43). We can only meet these many challenges if we personally "encounter each day your best friend, the friend who is Jesus" (150). Obviously, Pope Francis is speaking from his heart to our hearts, inviting us to strive to be "open-hearted" missionary-disciples!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ✦ How is Pope Francis inviting me to journey with the youth in my Christian community?
- ✦ What are some of the main obstacles youth face in following Christ today? What actions can I do to help youth overcome these challenges?

PRAYER PROMPT

Jesus, help us to be a missionary to today's youth by ...



SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.*

Proverbs 3:5

Querida Amazonia

DISCOVERING THE AMAZONIAN CHURCH

Christ redeemed the whole person, and He wishes to restore in each of us the capacity to enter into relationships with others. The Gospel proposes the divine charity welling up in the heart of Christ and generating a pursuit of justice that is at once a hymn of fraternity and of solidarity, an impetus to the culture of encounter. The wisdom of the way of life of the original peoples—for all its limitations—encourages us to deepen this desire. In view of this, the bishops of Ecuador have appealed for “a new social and cultural system which privileges fraternal relations within a framework of acknowledgment and esteem for the different cultures and ecosystems, one capable of opposing every form of discrimination and oppression between human beings”.

QUERIDA AMAZONIA 22

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for the gift of ethnic diversity. We thank You for the gift of different cultures, traditions, and languages that bring such beauty into our world. May *Querida Amazonia* teach and inspire us to continually uphold this community in diversity. Amen.

SUMMARY

Following the 2019 Bishops' Synod on the Pan-Amazon region, Pope Francis issued on February 2, 2020, his reflections in the form of an apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia* (QA), Beloved Amazon. This is his fifth exhortation, coming after *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018), and *Christus Vivit* (2019). Originally written in Spanish, *Querida Amazonia* has been widely translated.

Beloved Amazon is of modest length (16,000 words) and divided into 111 sections in four chapters. Each chapter is focused on one of the “four great dreams” that the Amazon region inspires in Francis; his dreams are social, cultural, ecological, and ecclesial. Since the renewed emphasis on synods emerging in the Vatican II era, this is the first to be centred on a distinct ecological territory. The Amazon region has about 34 million inhabitants, including three million indigenous people from nearly 400 ethnic groups; the territory covers nine various countries.

Four Dreams

Pope Francis himself provides a succinct overview of the document; he summarises his four dreams in section seven of the introduction.

Social

“I dream of an Amazon region that fights for the rights of the poor, the original peoples and the least of our brothers and sisters, where their voices can be heard and their dignity advanced”.

Cultural

“I dream of an Amazon region that can preserve its distinctive cultural riches, where the beauty of our humanity shines forth in so many varied ways”. The Pope continues highlighting his dreams:

Ecological

“I dream of an Amazon region that can jealously preserve its overwhelming natural beauty and the superabundant life teeming in its rivers and forests”.

Ecclesial

“I dream of Christian communities capable of generous commitment, incarnate in the Amazon region, and giving the Church new faces with Amazonian features”. Uniquely, these dreams are elaborated in a very artistic and literary manner, often employing original indigenous poetry.

Social Insights

Francis is deeply concerned about environmental and ecological stewardship, not only for Amazonia but for the entire world; “the mission that God has entrusted to us all [is] the protection of our common home” (19). “Efforts to build a just society require a capacity for fraternity, a spirit of human fellowship” (20).

Social dialogue is needed worldwide. Francis asserts: “If we wish to dialogue, we should do this in the first place with the poor. ... They are our principal partners, those from whom we have the most to learn. ... Their words, their hopes, and their fears should be the most authoritative voice at any table of dialogue.” (26). Indeed, “a prophetic voice must be raised, and we as Christians are called to make it heard” (27).

Cultural Dreams

Pope Francis emphasises a holistic cultural approach in the Church’s mission, stating that there is an urgent need “to respect the rights of peoples and cultures” (40). He speaks very personally: “I urge the young people of the Amazon region ... to take charge of your roots, because from the roots comes the strength that will make you grow, flourish, and bear fruit” (33). “Starting from our roots, let us sit around the common table, a place of conversation and shared hopes” (37). The Church’s mission seeks to promote an authentic

diversity, incorporating “dialogue between different cultural visions of celebration, of interrelationship, and of revival of hope” (38).

Ecological Perspectives

As Christians, we have an obligation “to care for our brothers and sisters and the environment” because “alongside the ecology of nature there exists what can be called a ‘human’ ecology which in turn demands a ‘social’ ecology” (41). “To abuse nature is to abuse our ancestors, our brothers and sisters, creation and the Creator, and to mortgage the future” (42).

Pope Francis believes that the indigenous peoples can teach us to practice the “prophecy of contemplation” (53), entering into communion with the mystery of nature; we can “love it, not simply use it” (55). We are summoned to avoid “a consumerist lifestyle” which leads to “violence and mutual destruction” (59). “Let us awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense”! (56)

Ecclesial Contributions

Francis repeatedly emphasises the Church’s task of inculturating the Gospel, because “a faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully accepted, not fully reflected upon, not faithfully lived” (67). In her mission, the Church must seek to capitalise on the popular religiosity of indigenous

people (77-80). Francis believes that “popular piety can enable us to see how the faith, once received, becomes embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on” (78). This effort will result in “an inculturated spirituality” (79).

Additional Insights

In *Querida Amazonia* one finds many deep insights on the Eucharist, women, holiness, and God’s revelation through “two human faces: the face of His divine Son made man and the face of a creature, a woman, Mary” (101). Friends, discover and enjoy another “Francis treasure”!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ✦ What can I do in my daily life to help Singapore become an inclusive society that welcomes migrants and is free from racial discrimination?
- ✦ What specific insights can we learn from indigenous peoples, their cultures and spiritualities? What blinds us from appreciating their contributions?

PRAYER PROMPT

Lord, we need Your help to accept people of ethnic diversity by ...



SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:2

Fratelli Tutti

FOSTERING FRATERNITY AND FRIENDSHIP

It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Fraternity between all men and women. Here we have a splendid secret that shows us how to dream and to turn our lives into a wonderful adventure. No one can face life in isolation. ... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together.

FRATELLI TUTTI 8

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we come before You with hearts full of praise and gratitude for Your boundless love and mercy. Thank You for the gift of community and the teachings of *Fratelli Tutti* that remind us of our shared humanity. Open our hearts and minds to truly see each other as brothers and sisters, fostering unity and compassion in all we do. Amen.

SUMMARY

On the eve of the October 4 Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi in 2020, Pope Francis released his third encyclical entitled *Fratelli Tutti* (FT), *Brothers/Sisters All*. As with Francis' second encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, the Italian title is drawn from the writings of the pope's namesake, Francis of Assisi, who lived in the twelfth century and is now the patron saint of ecology.

Fratelli Tutti is lengthy (43,000 words); however, its sheer size should not eclipse its relevant and urgent message! A few of its key themes are the following: renewed human relationships on all levels of society, the call for peace and reconciliation, the renewal of politics, care for the earth—our common home, more cordial relations between Christianity and Islam, and religions at the service of human solidarity. The individual chapters of *Fratelli Tutti* can serve as a walking tour of the encyclical.

Chapter One, “Dark Clouds over a Closed World,” summarises numerous challenges facing humanity today. Pope Francis notes that “as society becomes ever more globalised, it makes us neighbours, but does not make us brothers” (12). He also recalls that Francis of Assisi listened to God, the poor, the infirm, and nature; this seed planted by Francis needs to grow in our hearts (cf. 48).

Chapter Two, entitled “A Stranger on the Road,” is a marvellous reflection on Jesus' Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25-37). The Pope observes that this parable shows us that true community can only be built by men and women who identify with the vulnerability of others (cf. 67). Francis notes that there are many “injured” people in our world; he asserts that we must actually touch them, not only sympathise with them at a safe distance (cf. 76).

Chapter Three, “Envisioning and Engendering an Open World,” outlines a vision of human solidarity. Francis returns to the Good Samaritan parable; he observes that those who passed by the wounded man were concerned with their duties, their social status, and their professional commitments; the wounded man on the road-side was only a “distraction” from their personal, important daily duties (cf. 101). All people must grow in human awareness; we need “the spark of universal consciousness” (117).

Chapter Four asserts that everyone needs “A Heart Open to the Whole World”. This means appreciating diverse peoples, cultures, religions, and values. It demands recognising that all individuals are to be seen as gifts, bringing opportunities for enrichment and integral human

development (cf. 133). Francis asserts: “We need to develop the awareness that nowadays we are all saved together or no one is saved” (137).

Three chapters summarise some urgent needs of humanity today: “A Better Kind of Politics” [5], “Dialogue and Friendship in Society” [6], and “Paths of Renewed Encounter” [7]. We can appreciate the multiple, insightful comments of Pope Francis. He notes that world politics must address hunger; discarded food constitutes a genuine scandal. “Hunger is criminal; food is an inalienable right” (189).

Authentic politics needs to make room for the tender love of others; tenderness is the path of choice for the most courageous men and women (cf. 194). Francis believes that “life, for all its confrontations, is the art of encounter” (215); thus, we seek to promote the growth of the “culture of encounter,” seeking to transcend differences and divisions (cf. 215). It is important “to create processes of encounter, processes that build a people that can accept differences” (217).

Additional Insights

In *Fratelli Tutti*, one finds numerous suggestions to facilitate authentic human encounter and thus foster

community and solidarity. Genuine peace is only achieved through dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual development (cf. 229). As the Latin American bishops have noted: “The option for the poor should lead us to friendship with the poor” (234). We need to keep our historical memory alive, remembering such tragedies as the *Shoah*, the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the slave trade (cf. 247-248).

Chapter Eight, the final chapter, “Religions at the Service of Fraternity in Our World,” portrays the pivotal contribution that the world’s diverse religions can make to building fraternity and defending justice in the wider society.

Practical Applications

As we seek to grow in our faith and social commitment, we look for concrete paths to make progress; certainly, reading and absorbing the deep insights of Pope Francis’ writings will profoundly enrich us. Consider *Fratelli Tutti* as a vast smorgasbord of fine food; taste and savour all its rich fare. One might read a chapter a week, devote fifteen minutes to reflective meditation daily, or bring the full encyclical on your annual retreat. Whatever your choice, commit to absorbing and implementing the vision and dreams of Pope Francis on fraternity and social friendship. Truly, you will discover that we are “*fratelli tutti*,” “brothers and sisters all”!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ✦ Who are the “Strangers on the Road” in Singapore today? How can I be a “Good Samaritan” to them?
- ✦ Can you describe a situation when you encountered someone of a very different personality or culture, and you became friends? What are some obstacles that prevent our growth in human and social solidarity?

PRAYER PROMPT

Creator God, assist us to listen to the “cry of our wounded earth” by ...



SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

*love one another with mutual affection;
outdo one another in showing honor.*

Romans 12:10

Desiderio Desideravi

CONTINUING OUR LITURGICAL FORMATION

With this letter, I simply want to invite the whole Church to rediscover, to safeguard, and to live the truth and power of the Christian celebration. I want the beauty of the Christian celebration and its necessary consequences for the life of the Church not to be spoiled by a superficial and foreshortened understanding of its value or, worse yet, by its being exploited in service of some ideological vision, no matter what the hue. The priestly prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper that all may be one, judges every one of our divisions around the Bread broken, around the sacrament of mercy, the sign of unity, the bond of charity.

DESIDERIO DESIDERAVI 16

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the greatest treasure of our Church: Your Son, Jesus, in the Eucharist. As the Source and Summit of our faith, the Eucharist will always sustain the Church in its salvific mission. As we learn about *Desiderio Desideravi*, may we be inspired to grow ever deeper in our appreciation and love for the Eucharist and the liturgy. Amen.

SUMMARY

A precious gift from Pope Francis is *Desiderio Desideravi (DD)*, On Liturgical Formation; this apostolic letter calls for the rediscovery of the beauty of the liturgy and its central importance in the life of the Church. Issued on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul (June 29, 2022), this medium-length document is the pope's second document on the liturgy, following his 2021 *Traditionis Custodes*, which sought to place limits on the use of the pre-Vatican II liturgy by groups opposed to the pivotal reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

Precious Resource

This present letter is a powerful teaching document and a text for meditation; it reveals the deep liturgical and spiritual insights of Pope Francis that emerge from his many decades of living and celebrating the Paschal Mystery. For Francis—and everyone—to participate “at Eucharist is to be plunged into the furnace of God’s love” (57).

One may view the document as having the following three major topics or sections: liturgy in the life of the Church (2-26), the need for serious and vital liturgical formation (27-47), and *ars celebrandi*, the art of celebrating (48-60); there is also a brief introduction and conclusion.

Pope Francis notes that he is writing this letter to share with all in the Church “some reflections on the liturgy, a dimension fundamental for the life of the Church” (1). The title, *Desiderio Desideravi*, is drawn from the words of Jesus in Luke 22:15, expressing His desire to eat the Passover with His disciples before He suffers.

Liturgical Foundations

Part One provides a scriptural basis, a theology of the liturgy, some current difficulties, and the challenge to “live” the liturgy in daily life. Francis notes that we all should consider ourselves as “privileged invitees” to the Lord’s table; we, in turn, should not rest until the same invitation has been extended to all through the implementation of the Church’s “missionary option,” the fervent dream Pope Francis highlighted in *Evangelii Gaudium* (27).

Francis recalls that the Second Vatican Council and the liturgical movement promoted the rediscovery of the theological understanding of the liturgy and its importance in the life of the Church, promoting its “full, conscious, active, and fruitful celebration” (cf. SC 14). In the words of Saint Augustine, the Eucharist is “the sacrament of mercy, the sign of unity, and the bond of charity”.

Conciliar Insights

The second part of the document beautifully presents the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council and its foundational role in the Church's life; here Francis eloquently connects the acceptance of the renewed liturgy with the very acceptance of the Council itself. Thus, one understands the urgent need for a deep, ongoing liturgical formation for all members of the Church.

To appreciate the comprehensive renewal of Vatican II, one must read in harmony its four great constitutions: *Lumen Gentium* (Church), *Dei Verbum* (Revelation), *Gaudium et Spes* (Church in the Modern World), and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Liturgy). In addition, recall that an ecumenical council is the highest expression of synodality in the Church — and Vatican II began its *aggiornamento* (renewal, updating) with reflection on the liturgy. Although six decades have passed since the Council began in 1962, its deep insights remain foundational for our Church.

Liturgical Celebration: An Art

Part Three on the art of celebrating presents numerous pivotal themes; some examples are: celebrating is an “art”; it requires “consistent application” and a deeper appreciation of symbols; all are to enter into the action of the Holy Spirit forming the Christian community at prayer; moments of silence are essential.

Pope Francis notes that when the early Christian community broke bread following the Lord's command, they did so under that gaze of Mary (Acts 1:14). As Mary protected the Word made flesh in her womb, she now protects those being formed in the womb of the Church that protects the Eucharist, the body of Christ (cf. 58).

Special Emphases

Another crucial topic emerges at various points in the document: full acceptance of the entire corpus of Church teaching found in the sixteen documents of Vatican II. Emphatically, Francis asserts that there can be no retreat “to that ritual form which the Council fathers, *cum Petro et sub Petro* [with Peter (as Pope) and under Peter] felt the need to reform, approving [the revised liturgy] under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and following their consciences as pastors” (61).

The pope also notes that an Ecumenical Council like Vatican II is a pivotal expression of the Church's synodality (cf. 29). Clearly, speaking from the heart, Francis asks us “to listen together to what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Let us safeguard our communion. Let us continue to be astonished at the beauty of the Liturgy. All this under the gaze of Mary, Mother of the Church” (65)!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ✦ How has your understanding of the importance of the Eucharist in your personal faith journey changed over the years?"
- ✦ What are some specific ways that the Eucharist renews and transforms you? How can the Church better attract young people to the Eucharist?

PRAYER PROMPT

Jesus, we hope to share our faith in Your true Eucharistic presence by ...



SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4: 24

Laudate Deum

CALLING FOR URGENT CLIMATE ACTION

The Bishops of the United States have expressed very well this social meaning of our concern about climate change, which goes beyond a merely ecological approach because “our care for one another and our care for the earth are intimately bound together. Climate change is one of the principal challenges facing society and the global community. The effects of climate change are borne by the most vulnerable people, whether at home or around the world”.

In a few words, the Bishops assembled for the Synod for Amazonia said the same thing: “Attacks on nature have consequences for people’s lives”. And to express bluntly that this is no longer a secondary or ideological question but a drama that harms us all, the African bishops stated that climate change makes manifest “a tragic and striking example of structural sin”.

LAUDATE DEUM 3

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we praise You for the gift of our earthly home. The task of protecting and healing our world is not a small one. As we learn about *Laudate Deum*, stir in our hearts an urgent desire to respond to Pope Francis’ call of environmental conversion. Amen.

SUMMARY

In October 2023, Pope Francis issued a passionate call “to all people of good will on the climate crisis”. Releasing his apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum* (LD), Praise God on October 4, the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, the Pope enunciates a prophetic call to seriously address the contemporary environmental and ecological crises humanity is experiencing.

Present Context

This document arrives eight years after Pope Francis published his *Laudato Si'*, which bore the subtitle “On Care for Our Common Home” [2015/2023]. Francis desires to share his “heartfelt concerns about the care of our common home” and “our suffering planet”; he feels a deep sense of urgency because “our responses have not been adequate” (2). Thus, in *Laudate Deum*, Francis seeks to spark a serious examination of conscience with a concomitant commitment to decisive action!

Describing the Situation

Francis notes that “despite all attempts to deny, conceal, gloss over, or relativise the issue, the signs of climate change are here and increasingly evident” (5). Francis offers a realistic analysis; the evaluation is based on solid science and accurate statistics. It is no longer possible to doubt the “human origins” of climate change; unfortunately, some effects of the climate crisis are already irreversible.

Critiquing a Paradigm

In *Laudato Si'*, the Pope presented the “technocratic paradigm” that underlies the current reality of environmental decay; this paradigm continues to advance. It is based on a false vision that idolises technology and economic profit over human responsibility, values, and conscience. The human family needs “a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint” (24).

Politics and Climate Conferences

These two areas are covered in sections three and four of *Laudate Deum*. Pope Francis readily admits that “goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realised each day” (34). Genuine progress requires “effective world organisations, equipped with the power to provide for the global common good, the elimination of hunger and poverty, and the sure defence of fundamental human rights” (35). Unfortunately, such effective cooperation is painfully slow in emerging!

Motives for Action

The final section of *Laudate Deum* presents “spiritual motivations” for commitment and engagement in climate action. Francis notes that Jesus Himself was acutely sensitive before the creatures of His Father, speaking of the lilies of the field (Matt 6:28-29) and many sparrows (Luke 12:6). Truly, Jesus “was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because He Himself was in constant touch with nature” (64).

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that Pope Francis begins and ends *Laudate Deum* with the imperative to “Praise God”, to clearly recognise God’s sovereignty and the divine in all of creation and the entire universe. Praise God! Only God! Always God!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

✦ Pope Francis calls us to make “caring for the environment” as part of our personal pursuit of holiness. What habits do I need to change to respond to that call?

✦ What concrete steps can be taken to raise people’s awareness about the ecological crisis? How can one’s faith influence this urgent challenge?

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God, we desire to begin healing “our suffering planet” by ...



SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Psalm 150:6

C'est la Confiance

TRUSTING IN GOD'S MERCIFUL LOVE

Saint Thérèse is one of the best known and most beloved saints in our world. Like Saint Francis of Assisi, she is loved by non-Christians and non-believers as well. In addition, she has been recognised by UNESCO as one of the most significant figures for contemporary humanity. We would do well to delve more deeply into her message as we commemorate the 150th anniversary of her birth in Alençon (2 January 1873) and the centenary of her beatification.

C'EST LA CONFIANCE 4

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank You for accompanying us on this joyful journey with Pope Francis. Thank You for the gift of our shepherd, Pope Francis, and for his wisdom, mercy, and love. Help us to follow the example of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, and live a life full of love for You and for each other. Amen.

SUMMARY

Pope Francis, marking the 150th anniversary of Thérèse of Lisieux's birth (1873–2023), published an apostolic exhortation entitled *C'est la Confiance* (CC). It bears the subtitle: "On Confidence in the Merciful Love of God".

Introducing Thérèse

Pope Francis notes that Thérèse is "one of the best known and most loved saints in our world" (4). Thérèse interacted with several popes. Leo XIII allowed her at age 15 to enter the Carmelite convent. She died of tuberculosis on September 30, 1897, at the age of 24.

Only 28 years later, in 1925, Pius XI canonised her and two years later made her patron saint of missions. In 1997, John Paul II declared her Doctor of the Church. Pope Francis canonised her parents, Louis and Zélie Martin, during the Synod on the Family in 2015. Her feast day is October 1.

A Profound Spirituality

Widespread interest in Thérèse was sparked by the posthumous publication of her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*; it describes her unique insights into the spiritual life. It is the desire of Pope Francis that Thérèse's message may "be taken up as part of the spiritual treasury of the Church" (4). He also quotes Pope John Paul II, who referred to Thérèse as "an expert in the *scientia amoris*" (science of love).

Pope Francis notes that "the final pages of her *Story of a Soul* are a missionary testament expressing her appreciation that evangelisation takes place by attraction, not by pressure or proselytism" (10). Thérèse believed that when the soul is drawn to Jesus, it "plunges into the shoreless ocean of your love" (10). Francis asserts that "this is what happened, especially after her death. It was her promised 'shower of roses'" (13).

Little Way of Trusting Love

Thérèse used the image of an elevator in her Story of a Soul to describe her “little way”. “The elevator which must raise me to heaven is your arms, O Jesus! And for this, I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain *little* and become this more and more” (16). Francis affirms: “Little, incapable of being confident in herself, and yet firmly secure in the loving power of the Lord’s arms” (16).

Thérèse was delirious with joy when she found her special vocation. “My vocation is Love. Yes, I have found my place in the Church. ... In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be Love. Thus, I shall be everything, and thus my dream will be realised” (39). “This was the radical option of Thérèse, her definite synthesis and her deepest spiritual identity” (41).

Francis’ Concluding Prayer

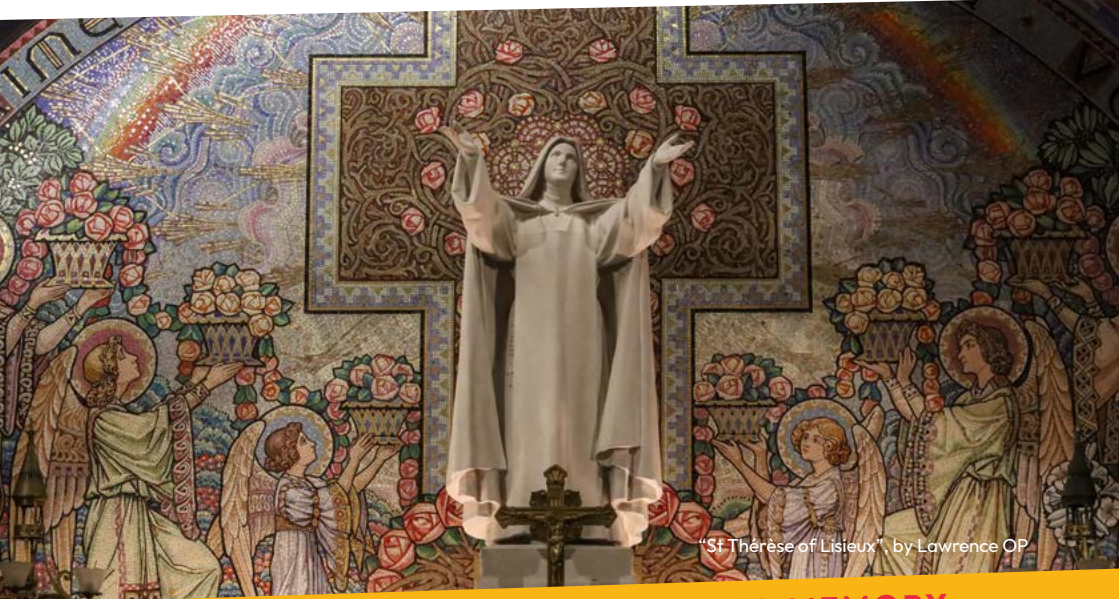
“Dear Saint Thérèse, the Church needs to radiate the brightness, the fragrance and the joy of the Gospel. Send us your roses! Help us to be, like yourself, ever confident in God’s immense love for us, so that we may imitate each day your ‘little way’ of holiness. Amen” (53).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ✦ What are some examples of humility that help me follow the “little way” of Saint Thérèse to avoid spiritual pride?
- ✦ Why are so many ordinary people deeply attracted to Thérèse’s “little way”? What virtues can Thérèse teach us today in our contemporary society?

PRAYER PROMPT

Dear Saint Thérèse, we will help spread your loving roses by ...



“St Thérèse of Lisieux”, by Lawrence OP

SCRIPTURE VERSE TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

*The Lord is my strength and my shield; in Him my heart trusts;
Psalm 28:7*

Concluding SYNTHESIS

Our twelve-stop pilgrimage with Pope Francis has been an enriching experience. Several “Francis themes” have surfaced during our rewarding journey.

✦ **Implementing the Second Vatican Council**

Clearly, Pope Francis has sought to bring the Council’s vision of renewal to the heart of the Church. Celebrating the Feast of Saint John XXIII, convoker of Vatican II, Francis notes: “Let us return to the Council’s pure sources of love. Let us rediscover the Council’s passion and renew our own passion for the Council”.

✦ **Becoming a Missionary People**

Repeatedly, Pope Francis calls the entire Church to a new chapter of evangelisation, inviting every Christian to a life of missionary discipleship. As those who have encountered Jesus, we are to share the joy of the Gospel. Our mission as disciples of Christ Jesus “is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for His people” (EG 268).

✦ **Caring for Our Common Home**

Pope Francis is passionately concerned with environmental and ecological issues that profoundly affect the earth and all living beings. He has written two pivotal documents on this topic: *Laudato Si’* (2015) and *Laudate Deum* (2023). Addressing climate change is undoubtedly a key pillar of his papacy.

✦ **Living Merciful Lives**

Pope Francis, often called the “pope of mercy”, proclaimed an entire year of mercy in his 2015 *Misericordiae Vultus*, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the close of Vatican II (1965–2015). Francis says: “We need to constantly contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace ... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man” (MV 2).

✦ **Seeking Authentic Holiness**

Francis consistently calls all to holiness in daily life; this summons clearly emerges in his 2018 apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*. We are to become saints, not simply settling for “a bland and mediocre existence” (GE 1). Francis asserts that the Beatitudes provide a pathway for holiness outlined by Jesus Himself.

✦ **Experiencing Church as Community**

Pope Francis encourages Catholics to be active members of the Church, despite its failures and imperfections, because the Church is a pivotal place where one can find Jesus.

✦ **Final Invitation**

We all know that walking contributes to improving our physical health. You are invited to take a long walk with Pope Francis; it will prove beneficial for your spiritual well-being. In addition, you will discover that it is a joyful journey in faith!

What could we have done better?

Thank you for using this resource! We hope that the reflections have helped you and your community to grow in faith. Did this resource meet your expectations? What else would you like to see in future resources? Your feedback is important to us.

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Inaugurated in September 2013, the Office for the New Evangelisation (ONE) is an office in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore working to realise the Archdiocese's vision of being a vibrant, evangelising and missionary Church.

As a catalyst for the New Evangelisation, ONE's mission is to facilitate processes and initiatives to move baptised Catholics into becoming missionary disciples.



The Catholic Theological Institute of Singapore (CTIS) provides education in the areas of philosophy, scripture, and theology for local students who wish for a more formal approach to learning the sacred sciences.

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