

Introduction

The most influential item I have read in recent years is the very first document from the hand of Pope Francis, his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*). Francis issued this beautiful reflection on missionary evangelization in the same year (2013) that he was elected as pope. It is valid to assert that this masterpiece contains most of the key spiritual and pastoral insights of Francis' many decades of dedicated ministry.

There is an obvious focus on joy in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG); this is seen in the sheer number of times that words such as joy, joyful, and joyfully are repeated (nearly 100 times). Pope Francis has mined the treasures found in the two interrelated apostolic exhortations written by Paul VI in 1975: *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) [Evangelization in the Modern World] and *Gaudete in Domino* (GD) [On Christian Joy]. *Both popes* constantly assert that if the Gospel is not heard from “joyful evangelizers,” it will not be heard at all by contemporary humanity.

The lack of joy and hope is an obstacle to effective evangelization. In the introduction of EG (10), Francis quotes extensively the sentiments of Paul VI who believed that joy would enable the world of our time “to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ” (EN 80).

With heartfelt emotion, Pope Francis writes: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.... I ask all of you to do this unflinching each day” (EG 3). “I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy” (EG 1).

Missionary disciples must listen frequently to the admonition of Saint Paul: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say

it again: rejoice” (Phil 4:4). Be transformed by joy. Believe that joy is “the most infallible sign of the presence of God” (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin). Indeed, joy is convincing; joy evangelizes. Surrender to the “Lord of Joy”! Respond to the invitation of Pope Francis! May these daily meditations assist you in living joyfully as dynamic missionary-disciples! Become joyful heralds of the new evangelization!

- James H. Kroeger, MM