

## Institute Voluntas Dei • October Lesson Plan 2018

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**Opening Prayer:** (+) Lord, Help us not to fear holiness. Send your Spirit deeply within us to seek holiness. Teach us the true meaning of holiness. Make us aware of your Saints beckoning us to holiness. Give us a holy fear to avoid what Leon Bloy says, “*The greatest tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.*” Dear Mother Mary, the first to say “Yes” to Jesus Christ, we humbly ask for your prayers to help us become true children of God, the Father and faithful children of the Church, our Mother. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Part 1: What is Holiness**

Pope Francis invites us to consider “holiness” - a word that “frightens” people because they believe that in becoming holy, in becoming a saint, they will not have fun or fulfilling life. Others hear the word “holiness” and they replace it with piety or devotion, praying for holiness but ‘not committing ourselves body and soul, giving our best to this endeavor (p25).’ Others understand “holiness” as something only reserved for others - as if they too are not called to be missionaries building up the kingdom of God (p27). Finally “holiness” can be misunderstood because we don’t see how “ordinariness” of life - when lived well with Christ as our focus - can bring us to heaven (p 7).

Reflection Question for Discussion:

- (1) How do you define holiness?
- (2) Who do you consider a “holy person” and why?
- (3) How can holiness and imperfection of our human brokenness be reconciled?

### **Part 2: Gaudete et Exsultate and Voluntas Dei**

This Apostolic Exhortation provides a deeper perspective for our Voluntas Dei Institute’s charism and spirituality. It’s as if Pope Francis and Fr. Louis Marie Parent had discussions, using similar phrases that are worth contemplating for ourselves and our own mission. In this introductory chapter, Pope Francis reminds us that holiness begins when we are willing to practice the presence of God and to live in the present moment. He gives the following examples and exhortations to learn about holiness by recognizing:

- (a) the daily sacrifices of patiently listening, avoiding gossip, teaching children, working for the common good and renouncing personal gain (p16)
- (b) those who have been imprisoned or enslaved, such as Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyễn van Thuân, who refused to waste time waiting for the day he would be set free. Instead, he chose “to live the present moment, filling it to the brim with love”. He decided: “I will seize the occasions that present themselves every day; I will accomplish ordinary actions in an extraordinary way” (p17). Also, Saint Josephine Bakhita, “Abducted and sold into slavery at the tender age of seven, she suffered much at the hands of cruel masters. But she came to understand the profound truth that God, and not man, is the true Master of every human being, of every human life. This experience became a source of great wisdom for this humble daughter of Africa”.(p32)
- (c) those who work to build up the kingdom by integrating and balancing “silence while not fleeing other” and understanding that “everything can be accepted and integrated into our life in this world, and become a part of our path to holiness. We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission.” (p26)

Reflection Question for Discussion:

- (1) How do you seek holiness in your daily life?
- (2) How does Pope Francis' words resonate with our Voluntas Dei spirituality?
- (3) How can our local team, national and international community incarnate foster holiness?

***Par 3: The Lord Calls Us to Heaven to Become Saints***

Holiness and saints are the same root word. It comes from the latin verb "sancire" which means "to cut, to tear apart and separate." As such, a holy person is separated from the world and reserved for God, i.e., consecrated. Yet, Saints, while reserved for God do not separate themselves from moments of compassion and companionship. They are separated from "sin" while fully embracing the sinner. Holiness puts us in between a rock and hard place - literally between heaven and earth - similar to Jesus suspended on The Cross. Holiness requires us to be rooted in earthly reality while striving to incarnate heaven in our human existence. As such Pope Francis, echoed in the Voluntas Spirituality, says, "This is a powerful summons to all of us. You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission. Try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognizing the signs that he gives you. Always ask the Spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received. Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today's world." (p23)

Reflection Question for Discussion:

- (1) If you could become a "patron saint" of something, what would it be?
- (2) How do you see yourselves as a "missionary"?
- (3) What do you think is the hardest part about striving for holiness?

***Conclusion:*** Pope Francis encourages us to not be discouraged or distracted. God IS with us always, by the mastery of the incarnation, the Sacraments, the Sacred Scriptures, within the Priesthood, and present in the People of God. While holiness can seem so far away, we can't lose hope. Nor can we presume that a simple recognition of Jesus and our affiliation to the Catholic Church or the Voluntas Dei Institute "guarantees" holiness and sanctity. Rather, holiness requires a full commitment of the person, an ongoing formation if you will. "We need a spirit of holiness capable of filling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelizing efforts, so that every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord's eyes. In this way, every minute of our lives can be a step along the path to growth in holiness." (p31)

***Closing Prayer:*** (+) Take a moment of silence to consider what aspects of our lives separate us from God, and what areas or relationships in our lives need to be infused with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that we actively practice holiness in every present moment in our life. Open this opportunity to offer petitions and conclude by together praying the "Our Father," "Hail Mary" and "Glory Be."