

VOLUNTAS DEI JANUARY 2019 TEAM LESSON
GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE
APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION OF POPE FRANCIS
ON THE CALL TO HOLINESS IN TODAY'S WORLD

Opening Prayer:

Ever present and compassionate God,

As we continue to welcome this New Year, may we remain ever conscious of your love, your mercy and your call to us to give witness to our ministry in the midst of the world. May we strive to keep things in perspective, rejoicing in the gifts you have given us, but keenly aware that those gifts are intended to be used in service of Your people, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Each of us, as members of the Voluntas Dei family, have the privilege and responsibility to “act with justice, love with tenderness and walk humbly with our God.” {Micah 6”8} May this love, humility and care for justice be genuine, heartfelt and run deep within us. We so need your strength, guidance and encouragement as we seek to continue the ministry and example of Fr. Parent and those who have gone before us.

We pray for all members of our Voluntas family and for those who gather at this moment for this time of reflection and sharing. May our time together remind us of our deep connection, friendship and common ministry.

In Your most holy name we pray. Amen.

Chapter 2: TWO Subtle Enemies of Holiness

Contemporary Gnosticism

This entire articles speaks about the Gnosticism and Pelagianism. In the first part of the article it is very clearly discussed about three major points, “*An intellect without knowledge, A Doctrine without mystery and the limits of reason.* Francis presents well how Gnosticism and Pelagianism play an important role in human life, and how they affect one’s own thought pattern and ideology. Gnosticism presumes a purely subjective faith that is only interested in a certain experience or a set of ideas as well as pieces of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings.

Neither has a positive impact for the growth of an individual's knowledge and wisdom. Francis also clearly states that, Gnostics judge others based on their ability to understand the complicity of certain doctrines, and they see the intellects as being separate from the flesh. Thus they become incapable of touching Christ's suffering flesh in others, whereas the author shows us in this article that the understanding of the Church has always been clear that a person's perfection is measured not by the information or knowledge they possess but in the depth of their charity.

Francis also presented Gnosticism as being one of the most disturbing ideologies because it considers its own vision of reality to be perfect. However, Christianity presents God as the perfect and infinite being who is all powerful, and it is God who infinitely transcends us, and is full of surprises. Historically, it is very clear that God is mysteriously present in the life of every person, in a way that He himself chooses. Francis states here that "even when someone's life appears completely wrecked, even when we see it devastated by vice or addiction, God is present there".

The limits of reason, here the author presents, "it is not easy to grasp the truth that we have received from the Lord. Our self-understanding of the word of God is very personal and often individuals misunderstand by information as well as Church doctrines which seek to express more clearly the immense riches of God's words. This point is very clear, from the words of great personalities like Saint John Paul II, Saint Francis of Assisi who said that "intellectual exercises distances us from the freshness of the Gospel."

Contemporary Pelagianism

Contemporary Pelagianism speaks about the denial of the doctrine of original sin and predestination. In this second part of the article the author speaks about a Pelagianistic ideology that is believing in one's own power and human will v/s the Grace of God. Those who yield to this Pelagian mindset, even though they speak warmly of God's grace, "ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others." Saint Augustin thought, God commands you to do what you can and to ask what you cannot and indeed to pray to him humbly: "Grant what you command, and command what you will." Francis states in this article, that "Grace acts in history; ordinarily it takes hold of us and transforms us progressively. If we reject this historical and progressive reality, we can actually refuse and block Grace, even as we extol it by our words". So, if we accept his grace and accept God, and stop trying to live our lives without him, the anguish of loneliness will disappear. In this way we will know the pleasing and perfect will of the Lord. The Church repeatedly thought that we are justified not by our works, or efforts, but by the Grace of the Lord. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that the gift of Grace "surpasses the power of human intellect and will". Finally, Francis states that "we must belong to God, offering ourselves to him who was there first, and entrusting to him our abilities, our efforts, our struggle against evil and our creativity, so that his free gift may grow and develop within us."

Questions for Reflection and Sharing:

1. What gives you a sense of joy and holiness in your ministry?
2. What are the barriers to experiencing this joy and holiness in your ministry?
3. In what ways can be a person of joy and holiness in your family, parish community, place of work or as a member of the Voluntas family?

Time for Intentions:

Please share any intentions that may be in your minds and hearts for yourself, your families, your communities, the Church or the world.

We sum up all of our intentions, whether we shared them verbally or whether they lie in the silence of our hearts in the words our Savior taught us. Our Father----

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for Your great mercy and Your great love. A love that manifests itself in the reality of every moment. May we seize each moment as an opportunity to experience Your presence, to have by Your grace the eyes of our hearts opened so that we may see Your will for us, that we may serve You to our fullest and bring You great glory.

Help us not get caught up in the things of this world. Let us lay down our attachments, our egos, the things of this world which we cling to, and simply open our hearts to you so that they may be filled with Your light and love. May everything we do, every seemingly mundane task, be a living prayer to our great God. May our lives be an expression of our devotion and love for You. Amen.

***{Voluntas Dei September 2015 Team Lesson
In the Footsteps of Jesus, Part 1}***