

Each week for the summer, a parishioner will reflect on a section of Pope Francis' Call to Holiness: his new Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad)*, which you can read at <http://w2.vatican.va>

Subtle Enemies of Holiness: Gnosticism

Continuing our reflection on Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad)*, I would like to share a few thoughts on Chapter Two, "Two Subtle Enemies of Holiness." Pope Francis calls to our attention two false forms of holiness: gnosticism and pelagianism. In many ways, these two heresies of early Christian times are two sides of the same coin. While gnosticism places undue emphasis on the intellect as the means of our salvation, pelagianism attributes to human will or personal effort the means by which we better ourselves and make ourselves saints. These seductively deceptive ideas both err in dismissing the role of mystery and grace in our salvation.

Gnosticism in its contemporary form puts forward a model of salvation that is merely interior, and consists in elevating oneself with the intellect beyond the flesh. It thus presumes to liberate the human person from the body and from the material universe. Falling prey to this way of thinking leads one to privilege one's own explanation of the entirety of the faith and the Gospel as perfectly comprehensible. With undue confidence, one then seeks to impose one's way of thinking on others.

As Pope Francis makes clear, since God infinitely transcends us (God is full of surprises), it is not easy to grasp the truth that God reveals to us and even more difficult to express it. Thus, our understanding and expression of doctrine is not a closed system, but one that values the questions, suffering, struggles, dreams, trials and worries of ordinary people as prisms through which we view and interpret doctrine. In the mystery of the incarnation, the Son of God took on flesh and lived as a human being to reveal God fully to us. As we respond to the call to holiness, we freely accept and humbly receive God's gift of grace as we walk our journey of transformation in the flesh and among our fellow human beings.

—Fr. John