

CHAPTER 2: TWO SUBTLE ENEMIES OF HOLINESS

While Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate: The Call to Holiness in Today's World* will take some time to digest and to unfold the gift that Pope Francis has given us, the Holy Father reminds us that we are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves.

In Chapter Two, Pope Francis warns us against two obstacles that may hinder our journey towards holiness: *Gnosticism* and *Pelagianism*. While these words may be difficult to understand, *Gnosticism* and *Pelagianism* were essentially two heresies that arose in the early church. They were corruptions of the real Christian message. *Gnosticism* claimed that only knowledge was necessary for salvation, saying that the mind was good and the body was bad and evil. *Pelagianism* focused on the will. It was the belief that one could be saved on the basis of their good works alone; there was no need of God's grace or mercy to help them.

In his exhortation, Pope Francis states that these two distortions of the Christian message still exist in our community today and may lead us away from the true path towards holiness. We may fall into the trap of believing that our understanding of the faith is the only right way, basing what we believe on our own subjective experiences. This is present-day Gnosticism. The biggest temptation is to pick-and-choose those aspects of Christianity that we agree with and reject the rest. We love God, but we do not want to live by Christ's commandments. We love Christ, but we find the Church too burdensome.

At the same time, we may fall into the trap of believing that our holiness only depends on our good works. We may feel good because we are doing so much and look down on others who do less or do not spend as much time in service to their parish or local community. This is contemporary Pelagianism. We may think we are perfect and have no need of God's grace, but we need God's presence in our lives. We cannot buy God's friendship with our good works. Rather, we recall Jesus' commandment of love: love God and love neighbor. These are not two formulas but two faces; the face of God reflected in the face of our neighbor.

In the end, Chapter Two provides us with advice on how we can be good Christians. The answer is clear: "We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount" (Pope Francis). Because the life of a Christian is a constant battle, we need God's strength and courage to reject evil and to proclaim the Gospel.

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