

 **VIRTUE CORNER**

G.K. Chesterton, the great twentieth-century apologist and convert to the Catholic faith, once remarked that becoming a Christian changes everything, even the way you brush your teeth. It may sound like a stretch, but consider this. As Christians, connected with Christ, everything takes on eternal meaning. Every moment, every choice, every duty lived in friendship with Christ can either advance his Kingdom in my heart and in the world, or obstruct it. They will advance his Kingdom under two conditions: 1) if they are in accordance with his will and; 2) if they are done to the utmost of your ability.

God made apple trees to produce apples and the sun to produce sunlight. He made people to reflect his own creativity and goodness through the resourceful and beneficial use of their intelligence and will. He gave you abilities so that you would use them to the full, for your own temporal and eternal good, and for that of your neighbors (near and far). In doing that, you give him glory (like the fruitful apple tree), you reveal his greatness, you achieve happiness, and you improve the world.

All that Christ did, he did with excellence. Do you think Jesus was a mediocre carpenter, spending more time in mystical raptures than sanding boards? Think again. Do you think Mary was a slovenly housewife, falling into ecstasies instead of keeping the household shipshape? On the contrary. The closer people come to God, the more they strive for excellence in every area of their life – because now there’s more reason for it: they have a chance to contribute to the eternal Kingdom; they have a chance to show God their gratitude and love and realize even more completely the dream God has for them.

The Christian who’s true to his friendship with Christ can never be conscientious in church stuff, but lazy, careless, and self-satisfied in everything else. Christ won’t let him, because Christ loves him too much. Like a coach who sees potential greatness in an untrained athlete, he’ll push and drive you to do much more than you ever dreamed, in every facet of your life.

Pursuing excellence is a way to love God, to find ever greater personal fulfillment and to love those in your lives. Excellence, brings God’s Kingdom into the world!

To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.
(Blessed John Cardinal Newman)



GOSPEL REFLECTION (30 MIN)

Matthew 5:13-15

You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Context. Jesus is preaching his Sermon of the Mount – the Magna Carta of his doctrine. He tells his apostles that they are salt and light. What is salt and light good for?
2. If any object, doesn't do that which it is meant for, what good is it? A car that doesn't run or a computer that doesn't save files, what good would they be?
3. What is it that a follower of Jesus is meant to "be" or "do"?
4. If you were to set some benchmarks of success for a Christian apostle, what would they be?
5. If you were starting the business of Catholicism, would you hire a catholic like you?
6. St Paul encouraged us to set our mind and hearts on what is worthy, honorable and excellent. From excellent ideals and thoughts come worthy actions. Do I examine my conscious on a regular basis to be sure my mind is set on the right things?



CASE DISCUSSION (30 MIN)

2 ways to go about it. Read the article and discuss afterwards how it can apply to your spiritual growth by going through the question. A second option is to ask a member to voluntarily offer their challenges in pursuing the virtue of Excellence at home, in the work place or in lumen action. The circle can offer some personal experiences on how they have confronted and resolved similar difficulties.

Making your New Year's resolution stick, Pursuing Spiritual Excellence

It can be daunting when your list of New Year's Resolutions for professional, human and spiritual growth is as long as your holiday shopping list. In addition to the post-holiday slump we all feel, not being able to keep your good resolutions by February, March or even late January can lead to giving up early and not progressing spiritually as you want.

lumeninstitute.org



Character



Faith



Leadership

However, it is important to remember that the New Year can be a great opportunity to look back at all the gifts and graces received in the past year and serve as a catalyst for incremental character changes in the new year. “Setting small, attainable goals throughout the year, instead of a singular, overwhelming goal on January 1 can help you reach whatever it is you strive for,” says psychologist Lynn Bufka, PhD. “Remember, it is not the extent of the change that matters, but rather the act of recognizing that lifestyle change is important and working toward it, one step at a time.”

By making your resolutions realistic, there is a greater chance that you will keep them throughout the year, incorporating healthy behavior into your everyday life. The American Psychological Association offers these tips when thinking about a New Year’s resolutions that can be very helpful when thinking about your Business Plan for the Soul and Excellence in the Spiritual life in 2018:

Start small

Make resolutions that you think you can keep. If, for example, you pray daily, schedule three or four days a week to stop in adoration or church, instead of seven. If you would like to be more patient, try accepting a few things that don’t bother you too much, rather than picking the thing that most gets under your skin to change right away.

Change one behavior at a time

Unhealthy behaviors develop over the course of time. Thus, replacing unhealthy behaviors with healthy ones requires time. Don’t get overwhelmed and think that you have to reassess everything in your life. Instead, work toward changing one thing at a time.

Write it down

Having a clear point that you are working on, is key. Nothing clarifies our thoughts and goals more than writing them down. It also helps to adjust them better as we know. We have clear goals in many areas of our life, why not in our pursuit of spiritual excellence.

Talk about it

Share your experiences with family, friend or a fellow Lumen brother. Consider mentioning a point you want to grow in order to have some accountability to reach your goals. Having someone to share your struggles and successes with makes your journey to spiritual growth and excellence that much easier and less intimidating.

Don’t beat yourself up

Perfection is unattainable. Remember that minor missteps when reaching your goals are completely normal and OK. Don’t give up completely on the spiritual “diet” because you ate a brownie and broke your diet, or skipped the gym for a week because you were busy. Everyone has ups and downs; resolve to recover from your mistakes and get back on track.

Ask for grace

God wants your spiritual and human excellence even more than you. Accept his help by asking for and calling on grace. If you feel you are unable to meet your goals or they just are not working for you, talk to your coach to help you find something that works...



Questions for Reflection:

1. What is one resolution or spiritual point you have been pretty good about incorporating it into your life? What was it about the point which made it doable?
2. If you were your own spiritual coach, what would you recommend you work on first?
3. Share a best practice that worked to integrate a point of work? eg. Using a reminder on the phone, post its, outlook reminders, a good spiritual book etc?

Excellence in Practice

In Family

- Study and understand Christ's vision for family life
- Actively involve all family members in making that vision a reality
- Regularly evaluate progress and comes up with ingenious ways to overcome obstacles

In Business Excellence Does...

- Study and understand Christ's vision for what businesses ought to be
- Set policies and goals to fulfill that vision in your particular case
- Utilize every possible resource, strategy, and principle to maximize the business's success
- Think, prioritize, and act in accordance with long, medium and short range goals

In Community

- Study and understand Christ's vision for human communities
- Take an active role as a citizen
- Get to know neighbors, local politicians, and local issues from every side
- Take an active role in the local Church community
- Take seriously your membership in a nation and in the larger, universal Church

Excellence Doesn't...

- Give up on improving relationships and situations
- Insist on imposing your own vision without trying to understand others'
- Save all your creativity and drive for the office

- Think only in view of short term gains
- Think only in terms of personal advancement
- Manage merely by reacting to problems instead of setting a vision and moving towards it

- Take community, country, and Church for granted
- Isolate yourself from community activities
- Only get involved when you have a complaint
- Save all your creativity and drive for the office

The Wisdom of the Ages on Excellence

That man is successful who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much, who has gained the respect of the intelligent men and the love of children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who leaves the world better than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul; who never lacked appreciation of earth's beauty or failed to express it; who looked for the best in others and gave the best he had. (Robert Louis Stevenson)



UPCOMING EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Manhattan Chapter

- Leadership Circles:
 - Greenwich January 16 Baker February 12 Rooney
 - Manhattan January 25 TBD February 21 TBD
 - Rye January 10 Gies February 13 Pope
 - Summit January 17 TBD February ? TBD

Atlanta

- Retreat January 21 – 23
- Leadership Circle February 13

Houston

- Leadership Circle January 16 February 20

Chicago

- Leadership Circle January 24 February 21

WDC

- Leadership Circle January

Nationally:

- National June 1 – 10 – Holy Land
- National June 9 – 17 – Rome
- National June 22nd – 26th Father/son mission
- National Retreat in New York City – Fall 2018
- Other Notable Events
 - Atlanta Retreat January 21 - 23
 - Chicago _____
 - Houston _____
 - Manhattan January 27th – 4pm Mass followed by Wine and Cheese with Fr. John Connors
 - Washington _____



Lumen Core Values Self-Assessment (10 minutes)

Core Values Assessment. Spend 10 minutes in silence assessing positive and negative examples of how you express your faith in Stewardship in your relationship with others and God. The below quadrant can help in jotting down some of your assessment as well as a tool for the whole Lumen Circle and how you can let it be a leaven in your life.

What struck me in this circle and how I might apply it to my THINKING. What CRITICAL ISSUES am I facing? What is the biggest CHALLENGES with these issues I face and what OPPORTINITIES does it present.

Prayer:

Family:

Business:

Lumen Action:

What ACTION STEPS can I take now or long term? Develop a concrete resolution for how you can improve in your efforts to exercise Christian charity in you interactions with others during the next month. Your resolution should be a specific action or activity that is easily measured.

