

## 12a SFX 2023

We have just heard our Lord prepare the disciples for their mission: to move from the **private** to the **public**, from the **whisper** to the **proclamation**, from the **darkness** to **daylight**. The twelve who had a ready intimacy with Jesus were being prepared to bear witness to him, to proclaim from the housetops **all** that they had heard and understood from the one who had revealed himself to them as **“the Truth” - “the Way, the Truth and the Life.”**

I think a similar dynamic happens to us each week at Mass. Here we experience the **intimacy of Christ** who comes to us almost secretly, a light in the darkness of our hearts, a whisper in our ears. We hear **God’s word** and recite our **Credo**s. And probably like the disciples we haven’t understood everything, and sometimes we might feel we haven’t understood anything. And yet with uncertain certainty we kneel, we bow down. Our hearts are touched by a **Truth**. We believe, we adore, we give our hearts to the Lord himself.

But then we go out into a world that is so often unbelieving, that does not understand what goes on in our hearts, and what it is we hold as **dear and true**. *“Proclaim from the housetops”* says Jesus. But the world seems to shut its ears when we try to *declare ourselves for Christ in the presence of men*.

**What do we do with this truth that we experience and how do we proclaim it?** One problem, is that people have become **suspicious of truth-claims**. Truth has been much abused in the name of intolerance and cruelty, so much so that people are afraid when someone says that *‘this is the truth’*.

Another problem is sheer **indifference to the truth**. At the time of Brexit and Donald Trump March, *Time Magazine* asked the question on its front cover **“Is truth dead?”** and the *Oxford English Dictionary* chose as their “Word-of-the-Year” the hyphenated word: **“post-truth.”** People talked of **“post-truth politics”** meaning the emotion, the way we feel about something had come to be more important than facts. The way I **feel** about something is more important than **whether it is true**. Truth is secondary. Feelings, not facts, are what matter.

According to the late **Rabbi Jonathan Sachs**, the first reference to a **post-truth society** was in the 6<sup>th</sup> cent B.C. when Jeremiah describes exactly the state of affairs, where [quote] *“not truth but falsehood predominates in the land.”* He says: *“Each deceives the other, they do not speak the truth, they have accustomed their tongue to lying, they are corrupt, incapable of repentance. Fraud after fraud! Deceit after deceit!”* Jeremiah 9:4-5

In such a society of fake news, those with the megaphones, those with the loudest voices, the ruthless and the shameless win. It is something accentuated by social media and newspapers. Lies can go viral whereas, corrections rarely do, or as the old saying puts it: *“A lie can travel around the world before truth has got its boots on.”*

It is a task for us to be attentive to the truth, to discern and sift the facts, to not repeat falsehoods, to watch where our prejudices lead us. Our Lord prayed at the Last Supper: **“Father, consecrate them in the truth.”** That is us. The world is very much in need of the witness of Christians who are “consecrated in the truth” and dedicated to the virtue of truthfulness in thought, word and deed.

We get a sense from Jeremiah of how being dedicated to the truth can involve suffering. He knew that in the absence of truth no society can stand. Just like **Thomas More and John Fisher** whose feast we have just celebrated. They would not sign an Act of State that went contrary to their beliefs, even if it cost them their **liberty and their lives**. Integrity was a key virtue.

When Pope John Paul II died in 2005, I was able to be present at the opening Mass of the following Conclave, and I remember the force of Cardinal Ratzinger's homily. He preached from the Letter to the Ephesians which says that we are "**no longer to be like children, tossed by the waves, and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching, taken in by the tricks of deceitful men.**" Rather, Ephesians goes on, "If we live by the truth and in love, we shall grow in all ways into Christ." *Ephesians 4:14-15*

The then Cardinal coined the phrase "**dictatorship of relativism**" against the modern tendency to judge everything by our own whims and desires. The tendency to say there is no truth, only "**my truth,**" that everything is just **subjective** opinion and it is intolerant to say that some things are right, and some things are wrong. Generally speaking, in Western society we live in an age of tolerance - good, but tolerance can lead to **indifference**. Have we really given up concern about **the truth of things**? Pope Benedict said and we must have the courage today to say that the human person must seek the truth and is capable of seeking the truth. We need not be driven by every fresh gust, and the latest slogan without making serious efforts to discern the truth of things.

**What do we do with the truth we experience at Mass?** Do we just shout louder from the housetops: "*this is the truth?*" Pope Benedict says: "**We never have [the truth]: at best it has us.**" In other words, all of us have to be humble before the great mystery of God, because "**the church is always advancing towards the fullness of divine truth**" as Vatican II puts it (DV8). The fullness of truth is always ahead of us and we are searching together. **But search we do.**

We do not use the idea of "the truth" as a weapon against people. Once we have understood that the **supreme truth**, the life-giving truth, is **LOVE**, it will be evident that to speak the truth means to speak it in love. When we use the truth to hurt or damage another we betray an essential aspect of truth which is love.

When Pilate asks Jesus "**What is truth?**" Jesus reveals himself as one who comes to rule not through **violence and force**, but through his own power, the power of love. We want people to share our experience of Jesus, the way, the truth and the life. The truth is a person, and cannot be reduced to edicts or dogmas.

**How do we move from the whisper to the proclamation? What do we do with the truth we experience at Mass?** Perhaps we can simply let the world know that we experience something beautiful: joy, hope, tenderness, a faint whisper of love, a glimmer of light in a darkened world. And we can invite others to search for the truth with us, the God, who wants us to become more truly ourselves. The God who has come to share his life with us and who here at this Mass reveals himself more lovely and more beautiful than we could ever imagine.