



MUSINGS OF THE ORDINARY EMERITUS

WHAT IS TRUTH?

A few days after Cardinal Pell's conviction was quashed by the High Court and he was released from prison, we heard the Passion of St John on Good Friday. In John's account Pilate asks Jesus an unanswerable question. The question was asked during Pilate's interrogation of Jesus who stated that his kingdom was not of this world. If it were, his disciples would fight to gain victory over Israel's enemies. Jesus had no legions, but rather was powerless in the sense that the world understands it. Power brings control. It belongs to the political realm, and control is the opposite of love which bears witness to the truth.

It is no wonder that Pilate asked Jesus the unanswerable question, "What is truth?"

In his book, *Jesus of Nazareth (Part Two)*, Pope Benedict XVI engages with this question of truth. He asks whether truth in modern times is considered to be visible in the structures of society or whether it is a purely subjective matter. Is truth what we want it to be? Is there such a thing as, "Your truth and my truth?" If these 'truths' differ, the only sure thing can be that they cannot both be true.

Pope Benedict asks the question, "What happens when truth counts for nothing? What kind of justice is then possible?" (p.191). He concludes that unless there are common criteria that guarantee justice for all and are not subject to the arbitrariness of changing opinions or the most vocal of lobbies, justice cannot be guaranteed and 'freedom' is only found within the boundaries of control.

The High Court finding in Cardinal Pell's case highlights Pope Benedict's point. Despite the quashing of all charges, there are still those who refuse to accept the outcome because they consider it to be a denial of their 'truth'.

Innocence and guilt can never be absolute in law. Because the consequences in a trial can be very serious, the benchmark for a guilty verdict in criminal cases is. that it must be 'beyond reasonable doubt' rather than 'on the balance of probabilities.'

What then is truth? How is it recognised? Humans possess the quirky quality of being able to recognise what is wrong or not true more easily than the opposite. Jesus said he has come to

“bear witness to the Truth,” and as Christians believe him to be the Word made Flesh and the image of the invisible God, (Colossians 1:15), the “world is true to the extent that it reflects God” (Jesus of Nazareth, p.192).

Those who live God-centred lives by being open to God and his will in preference to self-interest or the interests of the world’s powerful, are the ones who bear witness to the truth. Looking at creation through God’s eyes is the way to grow closer to the truth. Genetics has been described as the language of God, but it does not reveal the total truth. The ‘how and when’ can become known in our quest to understand more about how humans function. Yet the mysteries about the true identity and purpose of humanity not only remain, but are deemed by powerful groups to be irrelevant questions.

“What is truth? Pilate was not alone in dismissing this question as unanswerable and irrelevant for his purposes. Today too, in political argument and in discussion of the foundation of law, it is generally experienced as disturbing. Yet if man lives without truth, life passes him by; ultimately he surrenders the field to whoever is the stronger. “Redemption” in the fullest sense can only consist in the truth being recognisable. He becomes recognisable in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God entered the world and set up the criterion of truth in the midst of history. Truth is outwardly powerless in the world, just as Christ is powerless by the world’s standards: he has no legions, he is crucified. Yet in his very powerlessness, he is powerful: only thus, again and again, does truth become power.”

Jesus of Nazareth, 2011 Ignatius Press, p.194

“If you continue in My word, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Jn 8:31-32

“The only basis for justice is truth, because justice means truth for all.”

Cardinal George Pell (Catholic World Report, 6 April 2020)

***In Christ
Monsignor Harry
Ordinary Emeritus***

