

TRUTH AND CONSENSUS

"In today's globalized world, "the media can help us to feel closer to one another, creating a sense of the unity of the human family which in turn can inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all... The media can help us greatly in this, especially nowadays, when the networks of human communication have made unprecedented advances. The internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God". We need constantly to ensure that present-day forms of communication are in fact guiding us to generous encounter with others, to honest pursuit of the whole truth, to service, to closeness to the underprivileged and to the promotion of the common good. As the Bishops of Australia have pointed out, we cannot accept "a digital world designed to exploit our weaknesses and bring out the worst in people".
(Pope Francis: "Fratelli Tutti" para 205)

Is it possible to be concerned for truth, to seek the truth that responds to life's deepest meaning? What is law without the conviction, born of age-old reflection and great wisdom, that each human being is sacred and inviolable? If society is to have a future, it must respect the truth of our human dignity and submit to that truth. Murder is not wrong simply because it is socially unacceptable and punished by law, but because of a deeper conviction. This is a non-negotiable truth attained by the use of reason and accepted in conscience. A society is noble and decent not least for its support of the pursuit of truth and its adherence to the most basic of truths. (Pope Francis: "Fratelli Tutti" para 207)

The dignity of others is to be respected in all circumstances, not because that dignity is something we have invented or imagined, but because human beings possess an intrinsic worth superior to that of material objects and contingent situations. This requires that they be treated differently. That every human being possesses an inalienable dignity is a truth that corresponds to human nature apart from all cultural change. For this reason, human beings have the same inviolable dignity in every age of history and no one can consider himself or herself authorized by particular situations to deny this conviction or to act against it. The intellect can investigate the reality of things through reflection, experience and dialogue, and come to recognize in that reality, which transcends it, the basis of certain universal moral demands. (Pope Francis: "Fratelli Tutti" para 213)

All this calls for the ability to recognize other people's right to be themselves and to be different. This recognition, as it becomes a culture, makes possible the creation of a social covenant. Without it, subtle ways can be found to make others insignificant, irrelevant, of no value to society. While rejecting certain visible forms of violence, another more insidious kind of violence can take root: the violence of those who despise people who are different, especially when their demands in any way compromise their own particular interests. (Pope Francis: "Fratelli Tutti" para 218)

Working to overcome our divisions without losing our identity as individuals presumes that a basic sense of belonging is present in everyone. Indeed, "society benefits when each person and social group feels truly at home. In a family, parents, grandparents and children all feel at home; no one is excluded. If someone has a problem, even a serious one, even if he brought it upon himself, the rest of the family comes to his assistance; they support him. His problems are theirs... In families, everyone contributes to the common purpose; everyone works for the common good, not denying each person's individuality but encouraging and supporting it."
(Pope Francis: "Fratelli Tutti" para 230)

Deep within each of us is our relentless desire for the truth. In that search for truth we are sometimes confronted by seeming contradiction. We react in different ways when we become aware that what others put forward as 'right' or 'true' is in conflict with what we have already determined to be true. A constant theme that Pope Francis lays before us is that God is the source of truth and we immediately think of the passage of John's Gospel "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14:6). It will not be until we reach the end of our pilgrimage of life that our comprehension of the Divine Life, in whose image we are made, will become complete. In the meantime we acknowledge that, because God has created each of us, our attempts to further our understanding of the 'truth' is always a work in progress. In developing this theme further in this Encyclical the

Holy Father encourages us not to be dismissive of what others may posit – even when different from our own understanding – but to carefully consider what is being offered. Until all is revealed the best we can hope to achieve is a form of consensus of many sources as potentially the work of the Holy Spirit. The only absolute confirmation of what is ‘truth’ can only come through Divine Revelation whether in Scripture and Tradition and for the rest we are still on that journey. The Holy Father exhorts us to respectfully dialogue and prayerfully consider what each one is saying – in history, in the present age, and in the future unfolding. “No one can come to the Father except through me” are the words of Jesus and should not be adopted by anyone else – including me!!

Reflection.

1. Does my search for truth begin with me?
2. How do I manage conflicting views of what is true?
3. How do I react when my understanding of what is true is challenged?

Prayer for Truth

Lord, Jesus Christ,
You are the Way, the Truth and the Life.
Hear our prayer for truth and integrity
in all segments of society today.

May the truth be spoken by us and affirmed in others,
that in seeking truth, the world will come to find You,
the Source of All Truth.

Wherever relationships are weakened by deception or hypocrisy,
strengthen good Christian character among us
that we may bear witness to the critical need for truth.

May your Spirit of Truth fashion minds and hearts
open to a moral integrity so strong
that both words and actions can be trusted.

In public and private life,
deepen among us a genuine commitment
to honest, sincerity and truth-telling.

Let nations and peoples not compromise truth
by rationalization or pretence,
but safe-guard and defend it always
as Your most precious gift.

Lord, may those around us come to know
that they can take us at our word,
until that day when all the world lives in truth
and the Truth sets us free.
Amen.