

## TELLING IT LIKE IT IS: 20<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY C

Not long ago a Franciscan priest named Fabian Thom was shot dead in his bed at his home in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. This is what he got for his forty years of befriending, helping, healing, teaching, guiding and supporting, hundreds and thousands of people as a missionary, a missionary of God's love. His family says his murder makes no sense, because he made no personal enemies, and was always open and generous, kind and gentle, honest and truthful, with every person he met. Unfortunately, payback is still strong in PNG culture. But it remains a big puzzle why Fr Fabian became a target for those criminals that murdered him.

Fr Fabian joins a long line of prophets, spokespersons for God, who have been martyred for being constant and faithful in their work for God. They remind us that there's a price to be paid in our dealings with others, for always telling the truth and always living the truth. Jeremiah, the prophet, whom we met today in our First Reading, was dumped down a muddy well because he kept on saying what God wanted him to say but which people did not want to hear. Jesus, too, as our Second Reading has reminded us, stuck to his task of telling the truth without fear or favour, and kept on living the truth. For that he became a sign that was contradicted, and, in the end, was murdered on the cross.

At the birth of Jesus the angels sang: 'Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to the people God loves' (Lk 2:14). He was announced as the Prince of Peace. But that did not mean he was going to be weak, soft and sentimental. A lover of children, people without friends, poor persons, definitely! A speaker of pious, gentle but meaningless platitudes? No way! Jesus came to bring real peace to the world, but real peace always comes at a price, the price of misunderstanding, conflict and division, even within one's own family. The price paid for real peace, then, is always facing the truth and always telling the truth - telling it like it is - but, on the other hand, 'speaking the truth in love' as St Paul puts it (Ephesians 4:15).

A very perceptive writer called F. Scott Peck, has coined the phrase 'people of the lie'. In South Africa, the national lie was the system of apartheid, the unequal system of segregation and separate development of white people on the one hand, and coloured and black people on the other. Here in Australia, until the High Court Mabo case a couple of years ago, we have lived with the lie, that when settlers first arrived from Britain, Australia was *terra nullius*, an uninhabited land. The truth is that our aboriginal brothers and sisters have occupied the land for more than 40 million years. They therefore continue to experience Australia Day as Invasion Day. Being reconciled, then, must include admitting the truth, and in a spirit of what has been called 'tough love', putting right such wrongs as stealing their land, a wrong that has been labelled Australia's 'original sin'.

Always telling the truth is hard on families, on communities, and on nations. When a family stops pretending that Mum's drinking is not really a problem, or that Dad's gambling doesn't hurt anyone else, or that number one son's insulting and abusive language is just letting off steam, expect a blow-up when the message 'not happy, Jan!' is finally delivered. When a nation admits that its economy is based on destruction of the environment or the

oppression of certain groups, no one is going to feel comfortable about that. Telling the truth typically leads to denial, and denial to conflict and division, before a process of reconciliation and peace can begin.

So, we might ask, who is the one in our family, in our parish, in our other communities, in our nation, who keeps on risking unpopularity and even violence, by telling it like it is? Who among us is doing a Jeremiah or a Jesus, by always 'speaking the truth in love'? Who among us is game enough to say when it's needed, 'Not happy, Jan!' Maybe it's you, maybe each one of you! I certainly hope so!

Whether it is or it isn't, consider going into action this week in this way: - Spend one whole day as a teller of truth. Don't be silent when others are loose or evasive with the truth. Tell no white lies. Don't cover up for your best friend or anyone else. Get real with people. Find out what happens when you confront the truth, speak the truth and live the truth. Be ready too to be a whistle-blower wherever that's needed.

Without any fear or favour, without any deceit or hypocrisy, without worrying about being called a 'dobber', without any compromise at all! Be as fired-up about 'telling the truth in love' as Jesus was when he said: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already!' And say to God as you go about telling the truth, what we kept saying with the psalmist today, 'Lord, come to my aid!'

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