

BEING TRUE TO OURSELVES AND OTHERS: 6TH SUNDAY

EASTER A

Truth matters. So much so that Jesus says to us today: 'I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever, that Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive...' (Jn 14: 16-17a).

There's a well-known saying: 'Honesty is the best policy!' I tend to agree. Some time ago, I saw a very touching movie, one of the best I've ever seen, called *Secrets and Lies*. It's about a white woman who gave birth to a black daughter, and who was kept from seeing and sharing with her daughter all through her growing-up years. The story unfolds and undoes the secrets and lies that had kept mother and daughter strangers to each other during that long time.

The movie illustrates just how much the truth matters. So we want the facts and nothing but the facts, we call for truth in politics and truth in advertising, and in a court of law, we are expected to swear to the truth of what we say - 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'. We experience more and more protesters calling on us to 'speak truth to power', in both civil society and the Church.

The actual facts tend to speak for themselves. Just as important as sticking to the facts and telling it like it is, however, is to be known and valued as honest, sincere, genuine, trustworthy people, who don't deceive, mislead, or cover-up. Experience too tells us that to sustain and develop our relationships, openness, honesty, and transparency are not simply optional but absolutely necessary.

It's also a fact of life that we human beings cannot cope with too much reality. So we don't take kindly to anyone blurting out our faults and failings to our faces, attacking and abusing us, even though they may be telling the unvarnished truth. For the sake of our self-esteem and self-respect, something more is needed than just telling the truth to another. That something more is courtesy and politeness, patience and gentleness, understanding and tact. While deep down we want to face the truth for the sake of our integrity, we will take it much more readily from those who show they are on our side - people who care about us, people who support us.

What's all this got to do with the teaching of Jesus today? A great deal, I suggest. Jesus, who has just called himself 'the truth', as well as 'the way' and 'the life', is telling his friends, ourselves among them, that he has to go away. That's the plain truth. But some day he will come back to earth, and his followers will see him again. That's the second truth he tells. He goes on to share a third truth. For the time in-between, he is sending us the Holy Spirit, his second self, to be our adviser, mediator, advocate and support.

We rejoice, then, that the same Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who was the source of Jesus' own honesty, truthfulness and integrity, is given to us and stays with and among us. Unless, of course, we deliberately decide to be 'people of the lie' - an expression of the writer F. Scott Peck - living lives of spin, hypocrisy and deception! To illustrate! The Nestle food company recently claiming that the gift of water belongs to corporations and not to the whole human race! The slogan of those clamouring for abortion on demand - 'my life, my

body, my choice'! The advocates of so-called 'clean coal'! The 'trickle-down' theory of free market economics! The recent line – or is it a lie? - that 65 billion dollars of company tax cuts will benefit low and middle income earners, and not just company millionaires! The problematic claim of our National Anthem that 'for those who've come across the seas we've boundless plains to share'! True for some, no doubt, but not for all! Definitely not true for those thousands of human beings who arrived by boat seeking protection from persecution in their homelands, but who today find themselves languishing in indefinite offshore detention!

That same Spirit of Jesus that animated him 'to go about doing good' (Acts 10:38) and only good, is available to us 24/7 to empower us to be as truthful as Jesus. Jesus is also assuring us today that the Spirit of truth given to us is also the Spirit of love, empowering us to also imitate Jesus in the ways he communicated the truth. This was not only in straight-forward ways, but also with courtesy, politeness and gentleness, along with patience, understanding and tact.

For that gift of Jesus to us of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of love, given for our day-to-day dealings with our fellow-human beings, let us give thanks in the rest of our prayer together today! And let us pray that when we need to speak the truth to others, including speaking truth to power, that supported and guided by the Holy Spirit, we will always speak it without fear or favour, as well as with respect and love, care and concern!

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