

## "Where is Truth?"

Homily of November 22, 2003

by Father Brian Joyce

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This gospel is fairly familiar to all of us, and there is a line missing.... There is a line missing.... Pilate has a line. Jesus says, "I come into the world to bear witness to the truth. And everyone who loves the truth listens to my voice." Then, Pilate says something, a famous one-liner..... Going to have a little test, a show of hands. How many can remember what the line was that Pilate says? Raise your hands..... Oh, my goodness! Oh, my goodness! And here I was telling you how smart you were!!..... Pilate says, "What is truth?... What is truth?" and walks away. I guess I got that pounded into my head so much when I told lies as a little boy that I remember it more clearly than other people do.

"What is truth?" And Jesus says, "I am all about truth. And my followers have to be about the truth." We end up asking the question ourselves, "What is truth?" I think, more than that, we ask, "Where is the truth?" or "How do I find the truth?" We make decisions all the time in our lives and we want them rooted in the truth. We want them to be truthful. They might be decisions about college or career. They might be decisions about politics or about causes or about commitments or about relationships. We want them rooted in the truth. How do we do that? How do we make sure we are true? There is an easy formula, although it is so easy you can tell it is fooling you. You do it by being based on true values and true wisdom, and then when you have to make a decision, you get the facts. Get the facts, and then use common sense. Pretty easy formula. The problem is it fools you because it says the first step is to have true values and to have true wisdom. So, how do you do that, and where do you get that truth? I want to suggest that our truth is always connected to our God, and if we find God, we are finding the truth and if we find the truth, we are finding God. The two are inseparable.

I was back in New York the week before last for a convention and a set of interviews for a national position. (Not for me, for other people! I was the interviewer.) At it, one of the bishops told a story which is just classic. It was in Detroit where he was auxiliary bishop at one time. A visiting priest from Europe was at his parish for one summer, and didn't have much English, but he was celebrating Mass. During the Mass, he got to the words of consecration. He said the words of consecration over the host. He raised the host and genuflected. Then, he raised the chalice, put it on top of the host and genuflected. When he came up, he couldn't find the host! It was gone! He didn't know what to do. So, he had two altar boys next to him, a young one and an older one. He turned to the altar boys and he said, "Where ess God?" Now, the younger altar boy at least knew his catechism, and he said, "God is everywhere." This did not help the man. So he said it again louder, "Where ess God?" The veteran altar boy said, "You just put Him under the chalice." I don't think either of those answers helps us too much. They are a little misleading. The answer that "God is everywhere" may be true enough, but at the same time, you get this

feeling of a universal mist throughout the Universe that is too distant and too impersonal to help us, or the notion that we can put God somewhere (And I think we have that notion.) by special prayers or special things we do, that we can control God or tell God where to be or God answers to our beckon and our whim. That is not helpful either.

So, where do we find God? Where do we find truth, because that is where God will be. I think, number one, as Christian believers, we see Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We hear Jesus say, "I come that you might know the truth and that the truth might set you free." He says, "I have come to witness to the truth." So, one of the first steps is to watch Jesus and listen to Jesus, and also in our personal life, to be connected with the Risen Jesus, whether it is through personal prayer or prayer as a community. The first step is to watch and listen and connect with Jesus. That will begin to root us in the truth.

I think the next step has to be community. After all, Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered that is where I am. That is where you will find Me. That is where you will find the truth." Now, you think of the global, universal Church, being united to that community. I think that helps us find God and it helps us grow in the truth because the Church passes on its tradition, its beliefs, its history and its wisdom.

The Church is like a big family though, when you say "its history." We find that the Church inspires us and, at the same time, frequently embarrasses us because it has its mistakes and it has its sins. But, at the same time, what the Church does is it carries the gospel faithfully and it carries us and that helps us to find God and the truth. But, I am talking about the whole Church throughout the world, the Roman Catholic Church, the one, holy, Catholic Apostolic Church.

But, it also has to be the Church in our parish community because it is kind of like being called to think globally, but act locally. I would suggest most people find the Church (They may read about it in the newspapers. They may hear about the Pope. They may hear about bishops' meetings.) ...but they meet the Church in their parish community, at least in the United States. That is where we meet the Church. That is where two or three or more are gathered. And that is why, this weekend, we celebrate Christ the King as a parish, especially on this feast day, because we need the experience of parish and the parish needs us. We need the Church and the Church needs us. We celebrate that, and we are reminded of it.

The last place, not in order of importance, but the last that I will mention where we seek and find the truth is simply in ourselves and in our own spiritual journey. And we each have to do that. Remember the Spiritual, "You got to walk that lonesome valley. You got to walk it by yourself..." Nobody else will walk it for you. You got to walk it for yourself. I like Billy Graham's reply when the young man came to him and said, "I am losing my faith." He said, "you are not losing your faith. You are losing your parents' faith. And you are supposed to." We have to make our faith our own, our belief and our tradition of the Church, and our values. We have to make them our own. We have to walk that. So, the other place we find the truth and find

God is in ourselves.

And the God we find is everywhere. That is true enough. But I don't think it is as helpful as knowing that the God of the Universe is as close as our own hearts, knows us by our first names, and loves us. And that's the truth! Amen.