

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael Basque

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When I started school I wanted to learn as much as I could about everything. This desire brought me face to face with the problem of knowing the truth. Since not everyone tells the truth (for various reasons), how could I know something they said was true? Another thing I learned was how often people have parts of the truth but almost no one has the entire truth about a given subject. Discovering the truth involved listening to opinions or explanations, thinking about whether they were self-contradictory, measuring them against what I had experienced and comparing them to what I already knew was true. Once I knew something was true, I had to live according to that truth. Since I knew the truth about gravity, I wasn't going to jump out of an airplane without a parachute.

In today's Gospel, Jesus and Pontius Pilate have a conversation about truth. When the two met, Pilate likely had no knowledge of the plan of the Jewish leaders to kill Jesus. He could have known Christ and those elders had clashed publicly about points of religious doctrine. He could assume their bringing Jesus before him was their way of eliminating an annoying rival. But, Pilate knew Roman law gave the accused a right to face his or her accuser and one could not be convicted of a crime without evidence which was carefully examined. He likely wanted the issue to be settled within the Jewish community, but that would mean the leaders could not get rid of Jesus. His questions focus whether Jesus was a political king and so a threat to his power. But, Jesus didn't fit into the earthly categories of a man like Pilate. He came to earth to testify to the truth about God, which prompts Pilate's famous question "What is truth?" For Pilate, truth concerns the world of space and time. It is practical and gets things done. When he realizes the truth about Christ is not what the Jewish leaders have claimed, he tries to have Jesus released. Yet, he can't even live according to his own understanding of truth. He capitulates and sends a man he knows is innocent to his death. Truth can be an inconvenient thing.

Long before this Covid 19 pandemic, truth was having a hard time in our world. Media spin and alternative facts were undermining our trust in traditional sources of information. The massive increase of material on almost any topic available to most individuals has made it impossible for them to gather all the relevant facts and opinions and make sense of them. The rise of relativism within our culture means that one person's truth (moral or otherwise) is no better or worse than anyone else's. These trends are hindering the ability of many people to navigate our present situation. What is true? Who can you trust? Why can't I create my own version of reality?

Catholics and other people of faith know objective truth exists and understand its value. For this reason, when they recognize they have not fully grasped the truth about something, they will relentlessly pursue it until they do. When not distracted by pride or arrogance, they will converse with those who do not agree with them about the truth of some idea to reach a better understanding of it. They also seek the truth about more than God. Some of the greatest scientists, philosophers, artists and other thinkers in history have been produced by the major religious traditions of the world. The promotion of justice is also a search for truth. It seeks to determine the truth about whether a law was broken but also if the law itself is broken.

This commitment to the truth is important during our present situation. We need to be able to think clearly and avoid superficial explanations of what is happening to us. We need to accept the truth even when it isn't easy (more people will likely get sick and die) and live it. We stay home, engage in social distancing, wash our hands frequently, sneeze into our sleeves not just because we know it is true it will stop the spread of the virus but because it is also true we have a moral obligation to do so.

Pilate asked, "What is truth?" The answer is the ability to see the totality of the situation and act accordingly.