

TRUTH—( John 16:5-14)

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

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“When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”<sup>1</sup> But is anyone today listening?

Before the opening of the papal conclave following the death of John Paul II, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger celebrated Mass for the College of Cardinals in the Sistine Chapel. During his homily he addressed one of the most serious problems plaguing our culture today. He said:

“How many winds of doctrine have we known in recent decades, how many ideological currents, how many ways of thinking? The small boat of the thought of many Christians has often been tossed about by these waves—flung from one extreme to another: from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertinism; from collectivism to radical individualism; from atheism to a vague religious mysticism; from agnosticism to syncretism and so forth. Every day new sects spring up, and what St. Paul says about human deception and the trickery that strives to entice people into error<sup>2</sup> comes true.

“Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be "tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine", seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.”<sup>3</sup>

In that conclave, the man, who was to become pope spoke about the crisis of truth in our world today. And this crisis of truth is one of the primary causes of our present crisis of faith, as well as the present crisis in our country. During His last discourse in the Upper Room, Jesus told His disciples: “When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth,”<sup>4</sup> but when one looks around at the mess that the world is in today, one can only conclude that it is not the Spirit of Truth that is guiding it.

There is so much confusion and misunderstanding today about what truth really is—just like when Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?”<sup>5</sup> We are constantly hearing that there are many truths and truth seems to be dictated not by reality but by ideology and preferences. Truth, however, is not found in ideas and concepts of the mind. It doesn't consist in making the world conform to what we think, which is what people are trying to do these days. It is rather conforming our minds to the world as it exists. And if we don't see and accept something for what it really is, then the problem is not in that thing itself. The problem is in the person thinking about it.

Modern man does not want to either recognize or accept the truth because he does not want to recognize or accept God for who He is. We have, consequently, a massive crisis of faith and an enormous crisis of truth because if God is the First Truth, then a denial of Him is a denial of any truth whatsoever. It's as if there is a struggle with God about who has the truth. But God does not have truth. God IS truth, and any truth in the universe is true only because “God is the source of all truth.”<sup>6</sup> He Himself is the First and

Supreme Truth. That's why a denial of God is a denial of truth and a denial of truth is a denial of God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "man tends by nature toward the truth."<sup>7</sup> He is "impelled by ... nature and bound by moral obligation to seek the truth."<sup>8</sup> He is "also bound to adhere to the truth once [he comes] to know it and direct [his] whole [life] in accordance with the demands of truth."<sup>9</sup> Still, we know that many people go to great lengths to deny the truth, to deny what has been obvious and accepted by almost all people, in all parts of the world, throughout history. When someone negates or denies a truth of the Church, he thinks that the Church is wrong, but what he is really doing is merely projecting his own opinions on the Church.

Modern man knows the truth in his heart but because he doesn't want to accept it, he puts something else in its place and ends up pulling the wool over his own eyes. Even the Devil knows the truth. He just rejects it. Modern man's charade has resulted in what Pope Benedict XVI called this "dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires."<sup>10</sup> But beware! We always like to think that this relativism refers to someone else—to those heathen liberals out there. But relativism has so thoroughly permeated our culture that some of you probably even prescribe to some form of relativism without even realizing it—choosing your own truth about something.

In his book *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* Benedict XVI called relativism "the central problem for faith in our times"<sup>11</sup> because it results in a deep skepticism about whether anything is true or can be known to be true. Isn't this the case with those Catholics, who are constantly calling this or that thing in the Church into question? Calling into question the validity of the pope as the "real" successor of Peter, the validity of the Ordinary Form of the Mass or the validity of the pope's consecration of Russia to the Blessed Mother as Our Lady of Fatima requested? Benedict XVI has consistently called us back to "the inevitability of the question of truth."<sup>12</sup>

And this question of truth is very closely related to our freedom, which we so deeply cherish. Pope Benedict also wrote that "When the existence of God is denied, freedom is, not enhanced, but deprived of its basis and thus distorted. When the purest and most profound religious traditions are set aside, man is separating himself from his truth; he is living contrary to that truth, and he loses his freedom. ... If there is no truth about man, then he has no freedom. Only the truth makes us free."<sup>13</sup>

This doesn't sound like an intolerant hard-liner, as he has been characterized. Pope Benedict XVI has never made up any new doctrine based on his personal views. He merely stated what the Church has always and everywhere taught. He argued that the Church's teachings are not intolerant, as some say, but true. Yet many people in America and Western Europe are very unhappy with him. But sooner or later all of them will have to confront the hard truth because there are no conservative or liberal shadings of the truth. Truth, simply, is truth. And Benedict XVI is not a conservative or traditional Catholic. He is simply "Catholic." There can only be one truth and this is what he has always taught.

Any dissatisfaction with our Holy Father or the Church in general is in the end only a reflection of the world's profound crisis of culture. Some people blame our problems on the Catholic Church and some lay blame at the likes of Benedict XVI. But they are merely blinded by love of their own ego and love of their own desires because

“love without truth [is] blind.”<sup>14</sup> Benedict’s love is for Christ, the true man, in whom “truth and love coincide. To the extent that we draw close to Christ, in our own lives too, truth and love are blended.”<sup>15</sup>

When Christ stood before Pilate, He proclaimed that he was born “to bear witness to the truth.”<sup>16</sup> But like today’s world, Pilate asked: “What is truth?”<sup>17</sup> The evening before that encounter, Christ told His disciples “When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”<sup>18</sup> The Holy Spirit guided the Church then and He has guided Her ever since. He guided the Cardinals of the Church in choosing this man that He wanted to be the head of His Church as pope. Let us give thanks that the Holy Spirit gave us Benedict XVI because he is the Spirit’s chosen one. Like his Master, he will “bear witness to the truth”<sup>19</sup> and that truth is Jesus Christ, through whom all truth has been made manifest.

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<sup>1</sup> John 16:13.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Ephesians 4:14.

<sup>3</sup> Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal, Homily for the Funeral of Pope John Paul II, 8 April 2005.

<sup>4</sup> John 16:13.

<sup>5</sup> John 18:38.

<sup>6</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2465.

<sup>7</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2467.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ratzinger, Homily.

<sup>11</sup> “Cardinal Ratzinger Considers Whether Truth, Faith, and Tolerance Are Compatible,” about Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s book *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* on [www.ignatiusinsight.com](http://www.ignatiusinsight.com).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, from “Cardinal Ratzinger Considers Whether Truth, Faith, and Tolerance Are Compatible,” on [www.ignatiusinsight.com](http://www.ignatiusinsight.com).

<sup>14</sup> Ratzinger, Homily.

<sup>15</sup> Ratzinger, Homily.

<sup>16</sup> John 18:37.

<sup>17</sup> John 18:38.

<sup>18</sup> John 16:13.

<sup>19</sup> John 18:37