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Two Truths- Deacon Roger Vierra

During the past few years, we've witnessed an escalation of rhetoric from actors of seemingly all political and social viewpoints. This right to speak freely and to promote one's point of view is endowed by God and was considered so basic to human freedom that our founding fathers listed it as the first Amendment of our country's Constitution. In their wisdom, our nation's first leaders recognized not the perfection of man, but the imperfection of man, and the value of considering and debating different viewpoints.

In perhaps the most powerful example for Christians, consider the judgement of our Lord Jesus Christ --- first, His trial before the Sanhedrin and second, His judgement from Pontius Pilate. Both appearances lacked open and honest debate which defeated the search for truth. Sure, Pilate questioned Jesus and by washing his hands had declared that both Jesus and he were innocent of wrongdoing, but with the angry mob committed to their own ruthless ambitions, Pilate was willing to sacrifice the "Truth", an innocent man, to avoid a conflict with the Jews.

The judgement of Jesus is a foreshadowing of the circumstances which we Christians face today --- the truth as presented by Jesus Christ, and the false truths as presented by the secular world. This existence of two "so-called" truths is called relativism --- you have your truths and beliefs, and I have my different set of truths and beliefs. As with the sentencing of Jesus, these are permitted to coexist for a time, until the mob decides that their ambitions should prevail, and intimidation and violence are used to defeat ultimate truth.

Throughout the world, 340 million Christians --- that's one of every 8 of us, face high-levels of persecution and discrimination (for context, this is three times the number of those who have contracted Covid), including a 60% increase in the number of Christians killed for their faith since the pandemic began. Closer to home, we may not see these same levels of violence, but the attacks on Christianity are still ever present. One by one, many of our Christian values have been overrun while governments and media have ridiculed Jesus' teachings and taken measures to remove the presence and influence of God from our public and private lives.

During recent weeks, we have heard Gospel accounts confirming the authority of Jesus' divinity and power on earth. We heard God the Father declare at Jesus' baptism, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Then, we heard accounts of Jesus' healing power --- of Jesus

healing a man who was possessed with an evil spirit, of Jesus healing the mother of Simon who was suffering from a serious illness, and of Jesus healing the leper. These passages uphold that Jesus is God and that He has authority over the spiritual world and the natural world --- both obey His will. And, especially today, this all-powerful Authority means that the teachings of Jesus Christ and His church are the truths which can heal our communities of all of our present-day conflicts and challenges.

As Christians, we are the physical presence of Jesus on earth. It is our responsibility to stand for the teachings of His church --- to be prepared to share with others why we believe what we believe. To say to friends that this is my position because it is Jesus Christ's position, and to have the background to share some details. If you'd like to learn more, my fellow clergy and I are always available to talk, and you can always grab a book like this, "A Pocket Guide to Catholic Apologetics", which I found on Amazon for less than \$10.

A few weeks ago, a friend of mine and I shared this conversation. He offered his viewpoint on some very high profile social topics and I offered my and the church's viewpoint. The conversation was great because each of us was only interested in sharing our beliefs --- neither of us was trying to win an argument. In the days ahead, if we're presented with this opportunity, let's be charitable, and sincerely place our concern for our friends above our egos. Just share the truths found in the Gospel, the Word of God, and let the Holy Spirit do His work. Every person has been given free will to decide for themselves --- God gave us that. Even when Jesus walked the earth He was not able to convert everyone. Leave that job for God --- we're simply asked to be prophets to speak on His behalf.

Lent is often thought to be the time for us to reflect on how well we've followed our Lord's teachings in our private lives --- this is good, it's right to ask this. It is just as good and right, to reflect on how well we have helped others return to Jesus or to know Jesus for the first time --- especially that Jesus loves them unconditionally. As we make this self-examination, and recommit ourselves to Jesus' mission in an increasingly intolerant world, let's be motivated by this thought, "You can love someone and disagree with them, too." If the world lives by this teaching, peace will flourish all over the world.

May our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ bless you all!