



## Fifth Week of Easter

Fr. Josh Miller / May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

With this simple declaration, Jesus sums up everything about Himself, about what he has done and will do. Jesus tells us why God became Man, why God had to suffer, die, and be buried, and why he rose again on the third day. It's a simple statement – “I am the way, the truth, and the life” – but this simple statement demands close scrutiny because of the depth of meaning it contains.

Contained within this statement is the declaration that Jesus is the truth. THE truth. This is perhaps the most difficult of Jesus' three statements to understand, but to illustrate what Jesus means by this, I'd like to use a story from the end of World War II. Gunter Grass is a Nobel Prize winner, quite famous in Germany and elsewhere for his artistic achievements, particularly in literature. Grass served in the German army during World War II, and he wrote a bit about his time in an American POW camp shortly after the war ended. When Gunter Grass was in the camp, he came across this unassuming, brilliant young man who would play dice to pass the time, all the while quoting St. Augustine in the original Latin. He came to know this young man, and once they were talking about truth. Gunter Grass told this young man, “There are many truths.” But the young man disagreed, turned to him and said, very seriously, “There is only one.” That young man would go on to become Pope Benedict XVI, and this story brilliantly illustrates what Jesus says by calling himself “the truth.”

Jesus is the “truth,” the source of all truth. What he's saying is, “If you want to know everything, *know me*. If you want the world to make sense, *know me*.” Jesus Christ

is the very Wisdom of God, and to enter into union with Christ means entering into a union with the Truth. Jesus knows humanity, and he knows how hungry all of us are for meaning, for truth. And through this very simple statement – “I am the way, the truth, and the life” – he makes all of it, every last shred of it, available to us.

We're living in what I like to call the “Age of Pontius Pilate.” And by that, I mean we're living in a world where we've become so lost that we're inclined to wander around and say, “Veritas? Quid est veritas?” – “Truth? What is Truth?” The irony of this question is that when Pilate asks, “What is Truth?”, TRUTH ITSELF is staring him in the face. We've become a lot like Pilate in the modern age, second-guessing even the existence of Truth.

Relativism – the belief that everything is relative and that there is no absolute truth – has been one of Pope Benedict's major themes in the latter part of his life, because he realizes that a decline in those actively living out the Christian life is a direct result of the fact that we've lost our ability to identify something as BEING TRUE. Really, completely, 100% totally true. Because we've lost sight of Christ, we've lost sight of the Truth, and vice versa. In an era of political correctness, in an era where we've lost the ability to think logically but rather prefer to be ruled by our emotions and our impulses, in an age where we've taken the concept of “tolerance” and twisted it in to something completely different from what it ever meant before, we've lost the ability to call a spade a spade, to stand up and say, “THAT ISN'T TRUE!” And it isn't true, because it's not of Christ, who is the source of all Truth.

One of the other goofy charges of this “Age of Pontius Pilate” we’re living in, is that faith and reason conflict, are not compatible. But both John Paul II and Benedict XVI have dedicated their papacies in a very strong way to showing us that faith is indeed reason-able, it is indeed compatible with science. One of the reasons Christianity was able to spread and grow so quickly is precisely because it is compatible with philosophy, with reason, such that people came to believe through *rational* argumentation. It’s no coincidence that the scientific method, the university, and logical discourse grew up within the confines of the Catholic Church, holding together with band-aids at times a shattered Western World after the fall of the Roman Empire. The father of the Big Bang theory was even a Jesuit priest astrophysicist. What both John Paul II and Benedict XVI remind us time and time again is that the world is leading us away from Christ, and it is doing so *without* reason, without strong thought; the world leads us away through impulse, through passion, through all those things that Jesus warns us about which turn us into slaves, rather than great men and women.

And that’s really the point of truth, that’s really why I’ve chosen to echo our two last popes in this homily today. The purpose of Truth is to fashion us into better human beings, because as we grow in the Truth we grow in unity with Christ. We don’t think of a wise man or woman, one who has learned a great deal and then let it change his entire life, we never look at the wise man or woman and think “what a bad man, what a bad woman!” We think he is a holy man, a holy woman, one who has glimpsed the inner workings of God.

So on this and every day, let us rededicate ourselves to being people of the heart – not on an emotional, unthinking level, but in the classical understand of the word “heart,” in which the heart serves as the seat of the intellect, the mediator of emotion, the

moderator of our desires. Let us remain ever-dedicated to that hunger our hearts have for concrete, everlasting truth. Shakespeare says, “Truth is truth / to the end of reckoning.” And St. Augustine tells us, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in God.”