

Topic: Discerning the truth and welcoming the truth.

Subtopic: We are sanctified by the truth. This process comes with both rewards and conflicts.

Last week’s Gospel, if you recall, required the apostles to count the cost of how difficult sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ can be. I titled it “A Gospel Reality Check.” Today’s lectionary readings take the same theme in a different direction. They show us how difficult it can be to discern truth from error and, consequently, offer rewards to those who embrace the truth from those who deliver it. Hence we have the promise Jesus gave in our Gospel, ***“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.”⁴¹ The one who receives a prophet, because he is a prophet, will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward.”¹***

In our Old Testament readings, Jeremiah encounters a false prophet by the name of Hananiah, who only spoke about things the people wanted to hear. At first glance, it appears that Jeremiah agrees with him. But a closer look at the context reveals otherwise.

Being deceived by words that sound true is a common experience. In a conversation with one of my brothers this week, he spoke about a phone call that he received in the middle of the night from one of his grandchildren, who recently obtained a driver’s license. Both of his parents were out of the country (which, by the way, was foolishly posted on Facebook). In the phone conversation, my nephew said he had just been in a car

¹ Matthew 10:40-41

accident and needed their help. When my brother overheard the message, he took the phone out of his wife’s hands. He accidentally hung up on the caller as he fumbled with the phone. When he called his grandson back on his phone, my nephew said, Grandpa, you woke me from a deep sleep. What is going on? As it turns out, the phone call was a scam that used artificial intelligence to mimic my nephew’s voice to gain credit card information.

There are a lot of things that mimic what seems to be true but, in reality, are far from the truth. In most cases, it occurs when a half-truth is presented as the whole truth. And its results can be devastating.

When Paul wrote to the Romans in our New Testament lesson, he was dealing with concepts that were taken out of context. In the case at hand, Paul addresses what it means to be **“no longer under law but under grace.”**² The freedom this concept represents does not mean that we can now make up our own laws about right and wrong, nor does it mean that we live a life free from righteousness. The purpose of this new freedom is a spiritual transformation called sanctification. Because **“you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.”**³ Sanctification is a theological term that describes the process of becoming holy. Holiness occurs in a person who is progressively transformed into the Lord’s likeness as we separate ourselves from evil in all its forms. This process is aided when we receive the word of truth.

² Romans 6:15

³ Romans 6:17-18

I have seen something of this process in my daughter, Emily, and her husband, Jamie, who both take their faith seriously. A few years ago, they never would have imagined that they would take on the responsibilities of fostering two children, especially two who come from very troubled backgrounds. But they did because God changed their attitudes and desires to become more like his. As a result, they took classes in preparation for this undertaking and were given scenarios of what this might look like. In both cases, the children they received came from troubled backgrounds, greater than they could have imagined. But my daughter and son-in-law were willing to spend and be spent for the sake of helping these children. The reward Ellen and I have received by helping them in this endeavor has been greater than we could have imagined.

One of the children, for example, whenever she comes over and sees me, she runs and jumps in my arms. She doesn’t take for granted the love she has received, and she is very grateful. We have certainly experienced what it means when Jesus says in our Gospel, **“Whoever receives one such child in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”**⁴

So today’s readings give us pictures and images of rewards and blessings, along with the challenges inherent in receiving Christ’s message. That challenge will result in transformation, which results in our becoming more like Christ.

We see this transformation in Jeremiah, who had to have boldness in confronting lies with the truth even when it wasn’t what people wanted to hear.

⁴ Mark 9:37

Paul, in our New Testament lesson, had to correct false applications of truth, which required no commitment. And our Gospel relates these challenges to places where we can begin, as we welcome the least of these by “*giving one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple.*”⁵

In conclusion, we are all challenged to discern and welcome the truth as we show ourselves to be his disciples. Amen.

⁵ Matthew 10:42