

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Ben Frie SJ

Our sense of what is true is being compromised. The term 'fake news' is an attack on the formation of our world view: some people succeed in shaping the image of reality to their liking and in naming and shaming media that do not participate. The whole conflict around Ukraine shows how much truth is created to the advantage of each speaking party. Presidents and political parties take part in this, but what is worst of all is that we do it ourselves! Conflicts between people have their origin there: I create the reality according to what suits me, what pleases me.

Whistle-blowers have the typical task of pushing the demand for truth and putting to the test anyone who distorts it. Investigative journalism is the daring way to bring to light what should not have been seen, what has been pushed away from the perception of truth. Everything that we become aware of about abuse, sexual transgression, but also the abuse of our earth that should remain unnoticed, we can only judge again if we are also provided with information that we did not have before. Our perception, our ability to judge is limited, not to say damaged. Truth has become a subject of discussion, a matter of opinions that can be confirmed or denied at will. What gives us something to hold on to?

We like to judge others, knowing that we are on the right track, but that others are not. Then we like to correct them, directly and openly or just as indirectly by joining the gossip circuit. Everything seems permitted, as long as we ourselves are not called to account for unacceptable behaviour. Only when that happens, and it is irrefutable - someone is telling me the truth - can we become mournful and start to face our own misdeeds or malicious thoughts. Painful, but at the same time very liberating.

It is not really uplifting. Recognising imperfection is hard for us. Making our reality visible to others can be threatening. And changing ourselves for the good is more difficult than we thought. But there are people who can do that, and those people are immediately likeable because you feel that they are real, authentic, sincere. That makes them trustworthy, desirable, because with such people you can give shape to truthfulness, come up with solutions and take measures that are necessarily good for everyone.

So where is our unity? Is it still there if we want to live in a country where everyone makes his own truth? We are becoming more and more divided and discordant, and yes, it is a biblical expression: by the fruit one recognises the tree. We feel a paralysis, there is much disappointment. Where am I still safe, whom can I trust, maybe it's best if I retreat into my safe self-confidence. And so there is no one left to tell me that I have a beam in my eye. Can I help, I ask, while I myself need help.

The Bible is a book of human knowledge. Wisdom is always found in the Scriptures: 'A good man brings out goodness from the treasure of goodness in his heart; what the heart is full of, the mouth overflows with'. Praise no man before he has spoken; hear first what is said, for the speaker can be judged only afterwards. In speaking one discovers the true nature of man. By the fruit of the tree one recognises the orchard, and by the words of man his disposition. Can one blind man lead the other? Shake the sieve, the chaff remains.

Thus Jesus proves to be the unsurpassed teacher. He stands, as we say, with both feet on the ground. He has the right to speak, because there is no evil in Him. He has nothing to hide, everything He thinks and does can bear the light of day. He himself is the truth, he knows the relationships between people and especially their attitude towards the core of truth: God himself. People dared to swear by God, because then truth was on their side. People thought they had power over Him, but He could always say: "You have no power over

Me except that which is given to you from heaven". No power by reason of weapons or threatening language, but by reason of the undeniable truth for which He stands. In his case, the imperishable is clothed in the perishable: he became man in order to show us our untruthfulness and make himself the only way out, the only way to save us from our death through un-truthfulness. He shows the way, is the truth and gives true life.