

VERITAS: Our Call to be Truth-Seekers and Truth-Tellers

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One of the principles and ideals of Dominican life is "Veritas." It is rooted in and flows from a divine truth, to be lived out in love and justice wherever we find ourselves. Dominic was known as the Apostle of Truth and demonstrated in his life that the pursuit and living of truth, grounded in prayer, contemplation, study and community was to be the central concern and passion of the Order of Preachers.

The biblical meaning of truth implies reliability, trustworthiness and fidelity. God's promises define our approach to the Divine as well as all of our relationships, starting with ourselves, and reaching out to the broader community. Doing the truth in love and justice calls us to pay special attention to the millions of human beings deprived of their elemental rights, as well as the malnourished in body, mind and spirit. It also means reverence and care for the earth and all of creation.

After a few viewings of the evening news, one could easily conclude that there is a crisis of truth in our culture, our nation and our world, and even in our church. We live in a time of false promises and people are trying to search deeper for more satisfying answers. We are called as Dominic was, to walk with them in their search. The question is often asked: "Do we as a faith community accommodate our religion and beliefs to fit our comfort level and our culture? Are we more worried about being politically correct rather than being people who dare to speak the truth?"

Our approach to truth-seeking and truth-telling are also very important. Both aspects are but two sides of the one coin. One without the other is incomplete. We need to pursue and continue to discover the truth, and that is often a challenge. Believing we have the whole truth is often an illusion and may lead us to make false judgments of people and events based on our limited knowledge. Our understanding is always evolving and helps us avoid making others the victims of our misunderstanding of truth. We may hear only one side of an argument and assume that it is an absolute and definitive conclusion. In the past, we have put people to death in the defense of what we perceived as truth.

Where do we begin in our search for truth?

- We start within ourselves individually and in the services and institutions under our jurisdiction. Fr. Richard Rohr, theologian and author, calls us first of all to a path of inner truth. We dare to discover and claim our own dignity, our God-given worth as people who have great potential for good. We can also look at our own shadow side, deal with it and learn from it. This does not mean demeaning ourselves but claiming God's mercy in our own lives and in the lives of those around us. It is easy to demonize and blame others for the ills of our time. We see this happening at the national and international levels in the wars and conflicts around the world.
- We need to look at our institutions that we govern: schools, hospitals, nursing homes and other organizations. Do they reflect our mission, especially in our care and concern for

the impoverished of our day and in our commitment to racial and economic justice? Does our ministry lead to empowerment of the impoverished beyond meeting basic human needs?

- Today there is a great lack of belief in objective truth. We often hear the question: "Is culture shaping faith and religion?" Are we strong enough to address the ethical and moral issues of our time? Will we speak out against the war and arms build-up? Will we challenge a global economic system that leaves millions without basic human resources, like health care, education and other basic human needs? What about global warming and prison abuse and growing violence in our communities? Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., said the great crisis of truth now existing has led to the creation of the most violent century in history.
- By claiming and living the truth, we can become people of hope in a time of great chaos. Hope is based on the fidelity of God's promises and taking a chance on God's future. It is a belief that another world is possible and we are invited to work to make it a reality. It calls us to challenge every system and structure that devalues human dignity and human life.
- Churches and communities could develop circles of truth and hope and call on the Spirit to guide them in an effective response to the truth they discover. In that Divine presence, they will bring well-being and hope to their own lives and to the world close by and to the farthest reaches of the earth.
- Fr. Jean-Jacques Perennes O.P., recently visited the Racine Dominican Motherhouse while he was in the US presenting his book entitled "A Life Poured Out." It is the story of the life of his Dominican brother and friend, Bishop Pierre Claverie who was assassinated in Algeria in 1996 by a bomb planted and intended to kill him and his Muslim friend and co-worker. Pierre Claverie knew his life was on the line as he spoke and lived the truth but he decided not to go into hiding or play it safe. He said: "The church accomplishes its vocation and its mission when it is present in the ruptures which crucify humanity in its flesh and its unity." What price are we willing to pay to speak and live the truth in our time and place?
Another example is in the life and final words of Bishop Gerardi who carried out a unique ministry of truth-seeking and truth-telling in Guatemala's civil war "Truth is an open door for people to breathe and speak in freedom for the creation of communities with hope. Peace is possible -- a peace born of truth that comes from each and all of us. It is a painful truth, full of anguish and bloody wounds." Two days later he was put to death for speaking the truth.

We owe a deep debt of gratitude to those who have laid down their lives in truth-telling and acting on their beliefs. These words challenge us to take up our mission to be truth-seekers and truth-tellers. They inspire us to continue to live our call day by day with courage and hope, knowing we can count on the promises of our faithful and loving God.