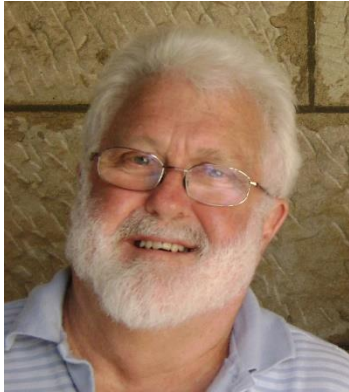


Fr Kevin Bates' reflection: What is truth ?



“What is Truth?”, Pilate’s iconic question to Jesus just before he is sentenced to death, echoes down the ages and is as pertinent in our time as it was back then.

Getting at the truth, recognizing, speaking and living the truth present challenges to all of us especially when we are under pressure and the revelation of the truth means that our shortcomings will be exposed.

Some truth is easy enough to embrace. The facts we deal with each day, scientific truth which is certain, factual news events are all easy enough to accept. Of course some news events bear looking into and then the truth behind them can become muddy and uncertain.

Being untruthful is an ancient and enduring fashion and is practiced with great expertise in every area of society.

We want to appear better than we are, wealthier, more skillful, more holy, more generous and so on. We so want people to think well of us that we drift into a world of smoke and mirrors almost without realizing.

When confronted with uncomfortable truth we run for cover. Every person and institution is prone to be defensive and in denial when failures are exposed.

The Church is an obvious case in point. The massive denials and defensive behaviours that initially marked our response to the dreadful truths regarding child sexual abuse still shame us.

Corporations, some of them iconic in this country have demonstrated similarly untruthful behaviours to their own great cost as their misdemeanours emerged into the public eye.

The current flurry of current affairs programs seeking to uncover the real stories regarding sexual misbehaviour at Parliament House in Canberra and the responding, uneasy shifting in chairs reveals our natural instinct to defend, deny and distract.

Some untruthfulness becomes an art form, almost boastfully displayed. During a recent and relatively short era in US politics, we were

introduced to the notion of “Alternative Facts”, which were lies dressed up as truth that many accepted as truth because of the person or persons uttering them. In the same mode the phrase “I mis-spoke”, in other words, “I lied”, became standard fare.

Speaking the truth in our society can get you into hot water, or at least make you the object of ridicule, especially if it is done at some cost to yourself.

A well-known instance in Victoria many years’ ago comes to mind, when the great Geelong AFL player, Gary Ablett Senior did just that. He’d not long given his life to Christ in his local church when he was charged with striking another player during a game. Instead of fluffing around by denying or defending himself, he simply omitted his error. When asked why, he said something like: “I’ve given my life to Jesus Christ and couldn’t let him down.”

He was ridiculed in the sporting press and nicknamed “God” from then on. The truth indeed does puzzle a society more familiar with subterfuge and deception.

Where does all this leave you and me?

Jesus reassures us that he speaks and lives the truth and that indeed it is the truth that will set us free. Experience bears this out. When I am truthful, I’m free of the burdens that deception and lies place on me. Having nothing to hide is certainly a great and liberating grace.

The freedom that shines out from a loving couple who live truthfully together is a great witness and blessing to everyone who knows them. They may even appear to be too innocent for this world and that worries them not at all.

The truthfulness of children, before they have learnt to wander into the world of lies, is more than just a joy to witness. They speak to us of the simplicity of God who is utterly true.

“Create for me a clean heart O God,” we cried out last weekend in response to our first reading at Mass. May that be our prayer this Holy Week.

Father Kevin

Mar 27, 2021

