

### ***Insights of Youth***

These are interesting times as Catholics and Americans! There is a great deal to be troubled about for sure. It is a time of great tension, and anxiety abounds. The negativity and rancor finds a special and unique outlet in all our forms of media, but most especially the media we access by phone. Recently I found myself doing what young people call “creeping” on my sons Facebook posts. He was having a conversation with a former Theology teacher about things that need to change in the Catholic Church. I found the discussion interesting. My son asked his teacher what he suggested the hierarchy of the church do to reach out to others. The list was interesting and compelling, and went something like this...

*“I would love to see us move away from the bite-sized homilies and reintroduce proper sermons in the Mass. Most Catholics are tragically under-catechized and have no idea what the actual content of the faith is”*

There was more but as a person who prepares sermons and is well aware of the pressures of time and meaningful content he had my attention. I am also a catechist and I do my very best to teach the truth of the faith. Not the faith as I think it should be, or the faith as I think that Christ meant it to be taught. But the faith that Church proclaims and protects.

### ***Truth and the Right Path***

It is a curious thing about our faith. It is not until we find our faith challenged and attacked that we begin to think about what it means. And to be clear... our faith and the whole of the Catholic Church are under attack from within and without. The conversation between my son and his former teacher gave me hope... at least these young people seem to care about their church. And as I read the prayer from today's Collect I found solace and a call for dealing with challenges to our faith...

*“O God show the light of your truth to those who go astray, so that they may return to the right path.”*

### ***Mistaken Thinkers***

Challenges and confrontations to the faith in general and the Catholic Church specifically are not new. We have been dealing with challenges, criticism and confrontation for all of our existence. Paul’s letter to the Colossians was a response to the challenge of Gnosticism. Gnostics were known in their day as intellectuals. I like to call them “Mistaken Thinkers” and to them faith was a purely intellectual pursuit, and it could be understood by only a few people. Salvation was a result of intellectual knowledge... And because it depended on this elaborate knowledge it was not for everyone. The Gnostics despised what they considered to be the unrefined simplicity of Christianity. They denied the unique nature of Christ... to them he was one in a long line of many, preachers, prophets and wonderful human beings.

When Paul says that all fullness dwells in Jesus... He is responding to Gnostic thought... He is proclaiming the utter uniqueness of Jesus, by stating that in Him (Jesus) there is the whole of God. For Paul salvation is not knowledge but the redemption and forgiveness of sins. It is not a philosophy but a person.

### ***Jesus – What we were meant to be***

Paul (*Colossians 1:15-20*) identifies two important characteristics of Jesus... He is the image of the invisible God, and the perfect manifestation of God. So what is that to us?

To see what God is like, all we need do is look at Jesus. In Paul’s mind if the human person wants to know what they were meant to be all they need to do is look at Jesus. In Jesus we see humanity as God designed it

and desires it to be. The perfect manifestation of God and the perfect manifestation of what it is to be human. And if we want to know why God sent his Son, all we need do is look to the cross. Jesus comes to save us... to show us the truth and to return us to the right path.

### ***Returning to the Right Path***

In today's first reading (*Deuteronomy 30:10-14*) there is the frequent occurrence of the verb "return." To return was to "be converted." Conversion requires that we have a change of heart where we understand that observance of the law is a labor of love. God has now put the disposition to obey the law on our hearts. The knowledge of the law is not a knowledge limited to only a few people. We all have it and we have had it within in us since birth... it is part of our human DNA. It is a gift from God that stirs in us an inner source of commitment. We no longer have to rely on our own strength because we have received as a gift from God a heart circumcised by Him that is fit for a renewed commitment. And the law is designed to guide our life in this renewed commitment. It is designed to help us return to the right path.

When Jesus instructs the scribe (*Luke 10:25-37*) in today's Gospel he is focused on two things... He wants to instruct him in the truth and He wants to make sure that the scribe is on the right path. He is concerned for the scribe's soul!

The Scribe however is an intellectual... a mistaken thinker. He knows the law... but the law is not written on his heart and so he challenges Jesus. There is an important reality and a bit of irony here. Scribes had phylacteries... a little leather pouch attached to their hands, which contains important passages from Scripture. It is very likely that this scribe had the very Scripture passage that he recited to Christ on his person.

The question that Jesus puts to the scribe at the end of the passage (“which of these three... was neighbor to the robbers victim?”) turns the scribes original challenge on its head. The truth that Jesus is concerned with is not about who belongs to God’s people, but rather the conduct required of a person of faith. Here we are given a vivid example of the fulfillment of the commandment to love. And we also see an important hierarchy and an order to the command to love. Before everything and above everything comes loving God in himself. If this is who we love first and most, then every other relationship falls into place. And as a consequence of the first commandment comes loving ones neighbor, because this is what God has asked of us.

### ***The Right Path – The Cross***

And that brings us to the medium of love, which is the cross. We are reconciled and put on the right path through the blood of the cross. It is through the cross, that God is saying to us: “I love you like this, I love you enough to allow my Son to suffer and die for you.”

Faith is not an act of the intellect... it is a choice. It is a decision to love all those we meet like God loves us. It does not subvert or set aside the law... it gives the law life. The cross is proof that there are no lengths to which the love of God will refuse to go in order to win our hearts. It is the fullness of the Catechism and the faith. We cannot properly understand what the Church believe or teaches without grasping the significance of what Christ did on the cross. If we apply merely human love as we know it to any cultural situation we will always get it wrong, because our human love (while awesome and wonderful) is flawed.

Love like the cross demands an answer. If that love does not stir love in our hearts than nothing will. Not proper sermons, not more catechesis and certainly not the intellect. If we don’t embrace the cross we are lost

***“Go do the same”***

Through the blood of Christ on the cross, God reconciles all things to himself. The reconciliation of God extends not only to all persons but to all creation. God desires to reconcile all people to himself in Jesus Christ. The medium by which he did so was the death of His Son, which proved that there were no limits to his love. What Jesus says to the scribe he says to us... “Go and do the same.” This is what faith and love are all about.