

30th Sunday Ordinary Time Year "B"
October 27-28, 2018

Dealing patiently with the ignorant and erring

Readings: Jeremiah 31:7-9; Hebrews 5:1-6; Mark 10:46-52

Read at the beginning of the homily:

President of U.S. Bishops' Conference Issues Statement Following Shooting in Pittsburgh

The full statement is as follows:

"This morning violence, once again, struck one of our communities, this time in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It is apparent at least eight souls lost their lives in a shooting at Tree of Life Synagogue. To our brothers and sisters of the Jewish community, we stand with you. We condemn all acts of violence and hate and yet again, call on our nation and public officials to confront the plague of gun violence. Violence as a response to political, racial, or religious differences must be confronted with all possible effort. God asks nothing less of us. He begs us back to our common humanity as His sons and daughters.

I commend to our Lord the victims, including first responders, and for the consolation of their families. May Almighty God be with them and bring them comfort at this tragic time." (fatality total grew to 11)

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When choosing our words, we ought to choose them carefully. Some terms are loaded- carrying a connotation that may or may not be entirely justified. One such word is *ignorance*. In today's reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, we learn about a particular quality of the high priest, namely that he is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring.

Upon hearing the word *ignorant*, most infer that it is an insult, an admission that another is a fool, dense or at least stubbornly refuses to seek the truth. Coming from the Latin root *ignorare*, it literally means, "to not know," or "being unfamiliar with" something. It in no way implies that someone is stupid or deliberately closed to knowledge.

Years ago, when explaining to high school sophomores the difference between civil and moral law, I used an example. If you are caught driving 50 in a 35 mile per hour zone, the officer is not going to care if you

honestly thought the speed limit was 50mph. He doesn't care, and you just earned a ticket. But if you were *truly ignorant* of a moral law, though objectively guilty of the sinful act, subjectively speaking you are culpable. This led one 16-year-old to quip- "Then Fr. Ubel, don't teach us anything more about morality!" For some, ignorance is bliss!

Theologically, ignorance is a lack of knowledge about something that a person *ought to know* for the good of his or her soul. We do not speak of moral ignorance when it comes to being familiar with the latest video game or which teams are playing in the World Series. Moral theology further distinguishes between *vincible* and *invincible* ignorance. The difference concerns the degree to which something ought to be known by reasonable people. There are certain conclusions concerning the moral law implanted in us by natural law. One thinks about the immorality of murder or theft to name just two.

When speaking of erroneous judgment, the Catechism makes some important distinctions. "Ignorance of Christ and his Gospel, bad example given by others, enslavement to one's passions, assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience, rejection of the Church's authority and her teaching, lack of conversion and of charity: these can be at the source of errors of judgment in moral conduct."<sup>1</sup> Invincible ignorance removes one's culpability for a materially sinful act, whether one of omission or commission.

It is equally true that all Catholics have a duty to form their consciences, to seek the truth- in other words, we have homework to do. We have no right to remain ignorant of God's truth. Though we were far from a perfect family, I am so grateful to have been actively taught to distinguish right from wrong early on in life. This is in fact a lifelong conversation.

If a parent attacks lying behavior, they do so precisely so that it does not become an ingrained habit later. Respect for the truth must be at the very center of our approach to life. If we play loose with the truth, our moral

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<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 1792.

framework is little more than a house of cards. We will lie to justify anything or to shield us from legitimate consequences of our behavior.

Dealing patiently with the ignorant and those in error is not only the call of the priests, as in the reading, but one of the spiritual works of mercy, namely “instructing the ignorant.”

Following today’s Gospel today, can we leave that behind which keeps us blind spiritually and that which holds us prisoner to our own desires? Can we reach out to others for whom the world has become dark and void of the deeper meaning that the Lord Jesus desires for our lives? Can we patiently engage those in darkness and error, leading them to the light of Jesus Christ? The truth Christ beckons us, not just to sit idly by, but like Bartimaeus, to take courage, and get up and follow Him.