

"INFORMATION OVERLOAD"

Truth versus falsehood

In our time and place, we live in an era where the availability of information has never been easier. The internet (the global system of interconnected computer networks), the World Wide Web (an information space), Google (a web search engine), and Wikipedia (an online encyclopedia) all combine to allow us to obtain billions upon billions of facts, often as easy as questioning "Siri" (a natural language user interface forming a knowledge navigator). The ubiquitous resources of desktop and laptop computers, and smartphone and tablet mobile devices enable online information retrieval seemingly from anywhere and at any time.

However, despite the unprecedented availability of information, we also live in an era of widespread disinformation (false information that is intended to mislead). Television, radio and the internet bombard us twenty-four seven with information (also served with generous portions of advertising, agendas and opinions). All too common are the new journalistic perturbations of "fake news" (stories that report on so-called information that has no basis in fact, often with specifically fantastic headlines to encourage sharing on social media), and "alternative facts" (demonstrable falsehoods).

At a recent conference held in Cambridge, Massachusetts on the future of news, Harvard University President Drew Faust commented: "Like journalists, we regard facts as the necessary foundation for human decision-making and human progress, in the policies of governments, in the discoveries of science, in the lives of individuals, societies, and nations. Yet we now confront what has been called a 'post-truth' era, one in which evidence, critical thinking, and analysis are pushed aside in favor of emotion and intuition as bases for action and judgment."

So what is "truth"? The word truth (Latin: *veritas*) is most often used to mean being in accord with fact or reality, or fidelity to an original or standard. Commonly, truth is viewed as the correspondence of language or thought to an independent reality. The opposite of truth is falsehood.

As Catholics, we believe that the primordial and foundational source of truth is the word of God. Three passages from the New Testament come to mind with regard to truth.

"Jesus said to him [Thomas], 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" Gospel of John, Chapter 14, 6

Jesus said, "But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you things that are coming". Gospel of John, Chapter 16, 13

"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work." Second Letter of Saint Paul to Timothy, Chapter 3, 16-17

Today's media coverage often falls short of journalistic integrity. You see this all the time in coverage of Pope Francis, who tends to draw big headlines (for example, "Who am I to judge?") when he uses a soundbite or two that suggest possible changes in Catholic doctrine, yet the media offers only the sound of night crickets when he strongly affirms orthodoxy on issues of moral theology.

In an October 4, 2016 prayer video, Pope Francis stated, "We need information leading to a commitment for the common good of humanity and the planet. We pray that journalists, in carrying out their work, may always be motivated by respect for the truth and a strong sense of ethics."

As a stewardship parish, we should all be focused on sharing our particular God given gifts of time, talent and treasure in maximally proclaiming the Good News of Salvation, the ultimate truth.

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