

I came across a Facebook post/advertisement recently offering a free webinar titled “5 Secrets to convincing Non-Catholics” about the truth of Catholicism. I have been involved with RCIA for several years and have a passion for helping people to understand the teachings of the Catholic Church. I am always looking for new ways to share the teachings of the faith with others. I decided to check the comments (657) and I was not surprised at the degree of resistance and in some cases outright hostility expressed in those comments. This is resistance and hostility I have encountered in my students and in my own family regarding Church teaching.

People who know me, know I love the Catholic Church and they know I believe that the Church teaches the truth as Christ did. This was not always the case. For me, belief in the Church’s teachings did not come easily. There were many obstacles and challenges that required serious study and reflection. And in confronting those challenges I have learned (sometimes the hard way), that the best way to know if a teaching is true is to try to live it. In this regard I think Chesterton gets it right when he states... *“The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.”*\

With all the divisiveness present in our culture, it seems like the last thing we need is a gospel text (Luke 29:49-53) that seems to encourage division. But there is a bigger point here. Jesus is warning us about our stubbornness regarding the truth. It is our own hardness of heart that leads us to hear and see only what we want to hear and see. In this passage Christ is reminding us that we do not create truth, and that living the truth is not always easy or nice. We cannot pick and choose right and wrong based on our feelings or if it looks uncomfortable. Our feelings can be, and often are misleading. They lead us to rationalize and justify based on ease and comfort. We are convinced that we know better. That we know more than others, and that what is true for us is all that matters.

When we are the judge of what is of true, it is hard to be open to the teachings of Christ and His Church. Christ knew this. His closest followers had a hard time understanding him and they often got him wrong, but they came to see his way as the only way. They did this by trying to live the way he lived. It is easy to get Christ wrong... we simply pick the truths that we like and adopt them as our standard for judgment. And we ignore what we don’t like or agree with. We look for the things that make us feel good about ourselves and others. We want a God who makes us feel good. Like a permissive parent, God becomes someone who is too “loving” to enforce His own boundaries. We desire a Christ

who tolerates peace at any cost, even if that means accepting behaviors that can cost us our lives and our souls. We want Christ's unconditional love on the condition we can stay as we are and do what we want. We forget that Christ mercy also comes with his judgement. We cannot have things one way and not the other. The truth does not change according to our ability to like or stomach it.

However much we wish to eliminate the element of judgement from the message of Jesus it remains stubbornly and unalterably there. The truth is... His coming would inevitably mean division and actually it did. He called people to a different and radical way of life. He called his followers to virtue... And he called them to embrace the cross... the difficult road, the untried way.

Jesus himself was the first to experience the distress of judgment. One day we will all face His judgment. That should encourage us to look at the things we are truly committed to. To challenge whether those commitments line up with the truth of what Christ and his Church teach. To embrace the challenge of trying to live a life of virtue and holiness. That is what it means to follow the "untried way." This is what the saints... that "great cloud of witnesses" mentioned in today's second reading (Hebrews 12:1-4) did!

The truth is... we simply cannot find the fulfilment we seek in life, except through living in communion with God. It is friendship with Jesus Christ that leads to communion. Therefore, nothing is more important than our friendship with Christ. Being a friend of Christ means following him... doing as he did. We must leave behind our old ways. That is the tough part... Living as Christ lived means going against many of the things our culture professes to be true. It also goes against many of the things we have convinced ourselves are true. It is embracing the Christian ideal and persevering through the difficulties that ideal presents... It is trying the untried way. It is confronting those difficult teachings in faith, humility, and trust that the Lord will give us the courage to live the truth as he taught it.