

Summer 2023

THE  
**GOLDEN**  
THREAD



THE IMMACULATE TODAY



AVE  
MARIA

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## ALL PEACE & GOOD!

**DEAR READER,** My name is Fr. Gerard Mary Toman. I am a Franciscan Conventual priest, and I am a member of the 'Blessed Agnellus of Pisa Custody of Great Britain and Ireland'. I am currently serving as the Guardian and Rector of the Conventual Friary in Oxford. Alongside other friars, our Oxford Friary houses those friars who are undertaking philosophy and theology studies in preparation for Holy Priesthood. In October 2022, I was elected as the Custodial Delegate for the Militia Immaculata (a worldwide Marian evangelisation movement, founded by St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe and other Conventual Friars in 1917). However, at the

time of my election, I was finishing my Licentiate studies in Dogmatic Theology in Rome.

I arrived back in England in March 2023, and I am now in a position to engage with the duties of this graced Marian apostolate. One of my duties in this role is to write, edit and help to produce 'The Golden Thread' – the Greyfriars' online Marian magazine (which replaced the much-loved printed 'Crusader' magazine of years passed). It is my dear hope and ambition to use The Golden Thread to write upon many and varied Marian and Franciscan themes, grounding my literary contributions in sound scholarship which is to be rooted, always, in solid Catholic doctrine and practice.

The person and vocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is never to be considered as 'an optional extra' for Christians who are striving to live a life of holiness, in gratitude to God. Mary is the Mother of God, the Mother of the Church, the Mother of our Faith and our true mother in the order of grace. As Christ's Perfect Disciple – as His Immaculate Mirror of human perfection – we are called to love Mary, to cherish and know Mary, and to serve Mary as our Queen, so that all glory may be given to the Most Blessed Trinity. As Daughter of God-the-Father, Mother of God-the-Son, and Spouse of God-the-Holy Spirit, one can say, without hesitation, that ignorance of Mary is ignorance of the full beauty of God's plan for the salvation of mankind, won for us through the Precious Blood of her Divine Son, Christ Jesus – Who took, at His Incarnation, His human nature from Mary.

I ask for your prayers as I try to fulfil my current responsibilities, and I ask for you to pray for all of our friars and for the many vocations whom God wills to join the Greyfriars of Great Britain and Ireland. May the Blessed Virgin, in her motherly care, intercede for good and faith-filled men to join our Order, so that we may continue witnessing to the world, as Franciscans, both the joy of the Gospel and the holy poverty chosen and lovingly embraced by Our Saviour and His Blessed Mother. Please be assured of my prayers, and do let me know what you think! If there is a Marian theme or topic that you would like me to write upon, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

**May God bless, protect and strengthen you, and may the Blessed Virgin, St. Francis and all the saints and holy angels, intercede for you!**

*Fr. Gerard Mary Toman, OFM Conv.*

# THE BLESSED VIRGIN: MARY MOTHER OF TRUTH / *Fr. Gerard Mary OFM Conv.*

God the Father sent His Only Begotten Son into the world so that, in Christ's human face, in His actions and in His words, the fulness of Divine Truth and Love could become visible to us mortal men. Mary is the Mother of God for, in joyful obedience to the Father's Will, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, she freely rendered to the Eternal Word His human nature – Who took flesh in her womb. Mary is the Mother of the Incarnate Word, Who is Truth, meaning that Mary can be known under the title 'Mother of God's Truth'.

In the Blessed Virgin Mary, owing to her being free from all stain of sin, we see the brilliant light of God's resplendence radiating out. Mary is the perfect model and exemplar of the Church's truth and purity. By the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, Mary conceived Christ within her. So, too, by the power of the Holy Spirit, our holy Mother Church bears children for God. In their respective motherhoods, neither Mary nor the Church suffers any corruption or disfigurement of their integrity. In her earthly pilgrimage – like the Church throughout the ages - Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the full submission of intellect and will, manifesting the obedience of faith to Him.

In view (*intuitu*) of the merits of Christ Jesus – the Saviour of mankind — God gifted Mary a singular grace. At the first instant of her conception, by virtue of this express grace, Mary was preserved from every stain of original fault (*ab omni*

*originalis culpae labe praeservatam immunem*) [*Papal Bull, Ineffabilis Deus (1854)* which dogmatically defined the Immaculate Conception]. It is precisely because the Blessed Virgin Mary is without any trace or contagion of sin, that she can look upon us with the merciful eyes of the tenderest of mothers. She sees in each one of us, poor banished children of Eve, the image of Christ her Son. Mary wishes to mother us in such a way that everything that is not of God within us is uprooted and cast aside. Through her prayers for us, through her action in our lives, she polishes within us – if we allow her to – the image and likeness of God.

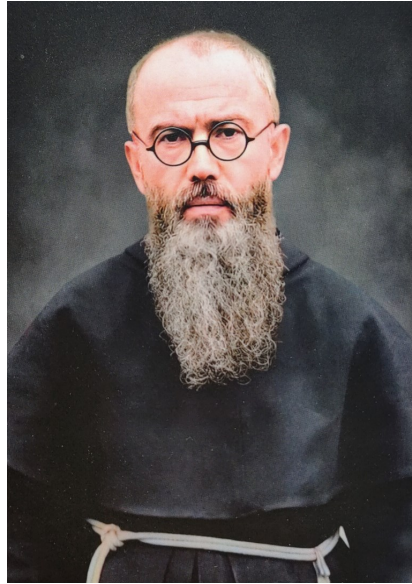


It is for this reason why Mary is always on the side of Truth. Eve believed a lie, Mary conceived Truth Himself. Eve brought her husband into the web of deceit, Mary shares her Son with us, Who breaks the bonds of sin. Having stood by the foot of the Cross and having seen her only son bleed to death, the Blessed Virgin Mary stands resolutely opposed to any lie, or to any lifestyle which would try to deceive the world in its promotion of *an evil as a good*. Mary knows that all lies and all falsehoods – especially those which touch upon the true dignity and vocation of the human person – if affirmed, empty Our Lord's cross of its power to save. Only the Precious Blood of Christ, only the saving teachings of Our Lord, only the glory of Our Risen Saviour can allow the contrite man to enjoy peace of conscience, to live a life which reverences the truth, and to reach salvation with the help of God's grace.

# THE BLESSED VIRGIN: MARY MOTHER OF TRUTH / *continued*

**B**orn in 1894, **St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe** was a Polish Conventual Franciscan missionary priest. Kolbe spent his religious life working tirelessly to promote and develop the Conventual Franciscan Marian apostolate. On 16<sup>th</sup> October 1917, along with a small group of other Conventual friars, Maximilian Kolbe helped to found the movement *Militia Immaculatae* (M.I.). The original purpose of the M.I. was «the implementation...of the Will of the Immaculata, expressed in the commandments of God and the Church, in the Rule and Constitutions of the Order» (*Writings 1375, 18 Sept. 1936*). A fundamental principle of the M.I is the Total Consecration of oneself to Mary. In 1927, Fr. Kolbe founded the Friary 'Niepokalanów' (City of the Immaculate) in Poland. Here, the Franciscan charism was to be lived out in an exemplary manner, under the explicit patronage and maternal care of Mary, the Immaculate Conception. Within ten years, Niepokalanów had become the largest friary in the world; over seven hundred and fifty friars – most of whom were religious lay brothers – lived and laboured there for the Marian apostolate, promoting 'Total Consecration' to Mary. In 1931, KOLBE founded a type of 'Niepokalanów' in Nagasaki, Japan called 'Garden of the Immaculate (*Mugensai no Sono*).

On 17<sup>th</sup> February 1941, during the Nazi occupation of Poland, Fr. Kolbe was arrested. His recently published article, titled 'Truth', had infuriated the Nazis. On 28<sup>th</sup> May 1941, he was transported to Auschwitz. After two and a half months, an incident occurred in the camp. An attempt had been made to



escape, and the Nazis inflicted corporate responsibility upon an entire group of prisoners who were then lined up. From this group of men, certain prisoners were selected for death. In the distressing scene, although he himself had not been selected to die, Fr. Kolbe nevertheless approached the Nazi comandante to ask permission to take the place of one of the men (a Mr. Franciszek Gajowniczek) who had been condemned to die. Miraculously, his offer was accepted, and Fr. Kolbe – along with nine other condemned men – were placed in a tight, dark starvation bunker. After a period of a fortnight, only four prisoners – including the saintly Franciscan friar – were still alive. On 14<sup>th</sup> August 1941, Fr. Kolbe was martyred; he and the remaining men were killed by the administration of a lethal injection of carbolic acid.

St. Maximilian was canonised by (the Polish) Pontiff, (now Saint) John Paul II on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1982. In the Pope's homily to mark the canonisation, St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe was declared a confessor and described as a «martyr of love». For a succinct and engaging review of St. Maximilian M. Kolbe's life, see: *Maximilian Kolbe: Martyr of Charity, by Fr. James McCurry, OFM Conv. (Catholic Truth Society, London, 2017)*. For those wishing to delve deeply into the richness and beauty of St. Maximilian's thought, the recent publication of the English critical edition of Kolbe's writings has allowed his theological vision to be understood with even greater precision (see: *The Writings of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, vol. I [Letters] & vol. II [Various Writings], ed. A. DI PIAZZA, 2015.*)

# THE BLESSED VIRGIN: MARY MOTHER OF TRUTH / *continued*

## ST. MAXIMILIAN MARIA KOLBE ON TRUTH

In January 1922, Fr. Kolbe founded the monthly periodical **Rycerz Niepokalanej** ('Knight of the Immaculata') which was a Marian devotional/catechetical publication.

Fr. Kolbe was the magazine's first editor-in-chief and the original circulation numbered around five thousand copies. However, by 1939, before the German invasion of Poland, the magazine's circulation was around eight hundred thousand. On 25<sup>th</sup> August 1939, Fr. Kolbe was confirmed as the Guardian (i.e. the Religious Superior) of Niepokalanów by the Provincial Chapter of Krakow (August, 1939) and on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland. Fr. Kolbe was first arrested by German troops on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1939 (along with his confreres Fr. Pius Bartosik, the Japanese cleric Ludowiko Kim, and thirty-five religious brothers).

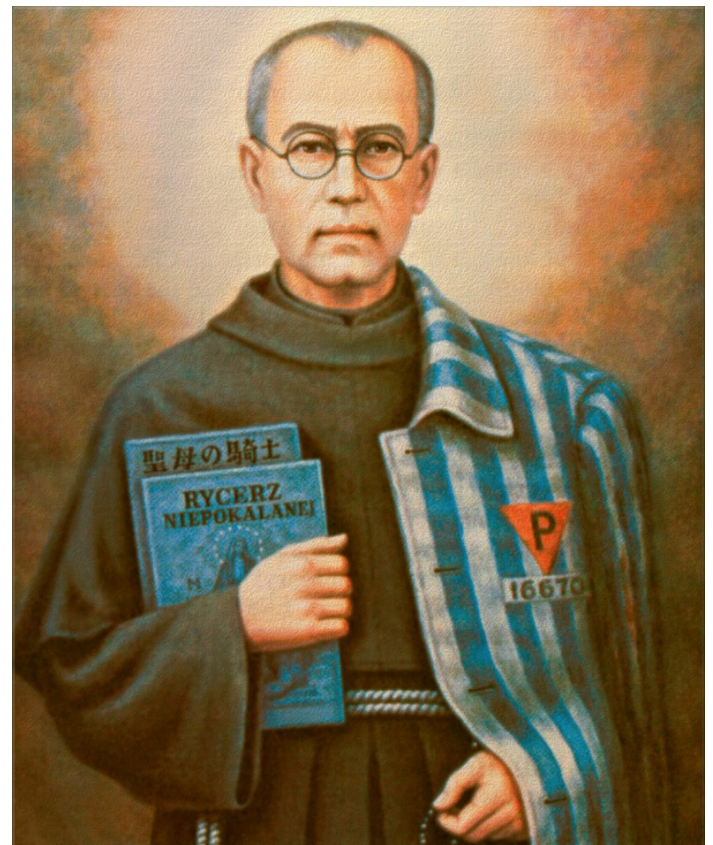
After a number of months in various internment camps (Lamsdorf [Łambinowice], Amtitz [Gębice] and Ostrzeszów) they were released on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (8<sup>th</sup> December 1939).

On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1940, responding to a request that had been made to them by Fr. Kolbe, the German authorities gave permission for the printing and



distribution of a single issue of the 'Knight of the Immaculata'. The run of the magazine (December 1940–January 1941) was restricted to the Warsaw area, and only one hundred and twenty thousand print copies were permitted. Kolbe's contribution to the magazine – which occupied only a few pages (*pp. 6-8*) – was titled 'Truth'; this would be Fr. Kolbe's last contribution to the magazine he had founded almost nineteen years before. As noted above, on

17<sup>th</sup> February 1941, Fr. Kolbe was arrested by the Nazis. His recently published article 'Truth' had infuriated the fascist occupiers.



# THE BLESSED VIRGIN: MARY MOTHER OF TRUTH / *continued*

Below, is an edited extract taken from the article

## TRUTH

*Rycerz Niepokalanej, December 1940–January 1941, pp. 6–8*

«Although not everyone loves the truth, yet only truth can be the basis for lasting happiness. Truth is one...[for] “yes” and “no” cannot both be true. Truth lies either in “yes” or in “no.” For the truth is one. Truth is also powerful...God does not erase (nor can erase) the truth by a miracle, for He is the Truth itself. How great is the power of truth! A power truly infinite, divine...those who hold beliefs that differ from the reality of things are mistaken. Only those who judge according to the truth have a true faith...only those who are in the universal, catholic Church walk along the true path. And if they move toward God faithfully, following the teachings of the Church, they have the assurance of achieving eternal happiness and peace and joy even on this earth...No one can change any truth. One can only seek the truth, find it, acknowledge it, conform one’s life to it, walk on the path of truth in each matter, especially those concerning the ultimate purpose of life, one’s relationship with God, that is, the questions of religion, lasting happiness... However, a happiness that is not built on truth cannot be long lasting, as is the case with mendacity itself. Only truth can be and is the unshakable foundation of happiness, both for individuals and for the whole of humanity.”

*[extended quotation taken from: The Writings of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, Vol. II [Various Writings], ed. DI PIAZZA, A., Nerbini International, Firenze, 2015, pp.2151-53]*

Given that the last article St. Maximilian Kolbe would ever write for the ‘Knight of the Immaculate’ was titled ‘Truth’, I thought

that it would be fitting to here explore the moral obligation we have to reverence the truth, and to avoid the evil of lying.

## LYING

*“You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another” [Lev. 19:11]*

*‘Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” [Jn. 14:6]*

God is the source of *all* truth, and as followers of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, Christians need to have a reliable relationship with the truth, after all, ‘grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (*Jn 1:17*). Called to be ‘children of light’ (*Eph. 5:8*) in the world, Christians understand that the path to holiness is to be found in ‘obedience to the truth’ (*1 Pet 1:22*). However, owing to our fallen human nature, there is always the temptation for us to exchange ‘the truth about God for a lie’ (*Rom. 1:25*).

A lie is defined as a voluntary utterance (i.e. something deliberately said) which is contrary to the speaker’s intellectual conviction (i.e. the person telling the lie knows it to be a lie). The malice of lying resides, not principally or essentially, in the misleading of a person who has the right to know the truth, but rather in the violence done in the discrepancy between what one thinks/knows and what one says. It follows from this that, in respect to natural law, it is never lawful to tell a lie, even in extreme need or circumstances; no reason – no matter how grave – can *justify* lying. The eighth commandment is «thou shalt not bear false witness» (*Exodus 20:16*), and false witness concerns three principal sins: perjury, injustice, lying. It is the last of these sins, lying, that this short article is especially concerned with.

# THE BLESSED VIRGIN: MARY MOTHER OF TRUTH / *continued*

Sacred Scripture, the inspired word of God, prohibits *all* forms of lying. Here no casuistic distinctions are permitted. This should come as no surprise. Given that God is the Principal Author of Sacred Scripture, the Bible will clearly reflect, mirror and correspond to its Divine source. In both the Old and New Testaments, scripture teaches us that God is Love, that God is Truth, that in His self-revelation God is self-consistent, reliable and that man can arrive at sure knowledge about His Divine attributes (*Cf. Ex 23:7; Num. 23:19; Ps. 12:6; Isa. 28:15; Amos 2:4; Rom. 1:25, 3:4-9, 13; 2 Cor. 1:18; Col. 3:9, Tit.1:2*). When one lies, one is not simply falsifying statements; one is dishonouring the God of Truth, Who made you that you might, through His grace, participate in His Divine Life, and mirror to the world His Divine Goodness.

Lying is, therefore, an intrinsic moral evil, meaning that it is a malice that can never be considered as 'a good', or as having anything inherently noble about it, regardless of what perceived positives may result from lying. The New Testament is absolutely clear that lying is an abomination that devastates lives (*cf. Acts 5:3-5*) and we recall Our Lord's words regarding Satan: "*He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies*" (*Jn. 8:44*).

Lying also offends against human dignity. This is because the natural purpose of human speech is so that man can reveal, to another, what is in his mind – lying distorts this fraternal communion. Further, not only is the listener deceived by a lie (*and Christ calls us to love our neighbour, Mk. 12:30-31*) but the person uttering the

lie is also diminished by involving himself in an evil action of which he will suffer other evils as a consequence. Owing to its being contrary to truthfulness, lying is, therefore, an abuse of the gift and value of speech, and it must be condemned.

What ought one to do, then, if one finds themselves in a situation when two precepts of the natural law appear to clash? What if the obligation to speak the truth is challenged by the need to protect and defend innocent life?

Well, let's imagine just such a scenario. Imagine that, one evening, a violent convict escapes from prison intending to commit as much evil as possible before being caught and returned to his cell. He approaches a house and bangs on the door. When the homeowner opens the door, the convict growls "*are there any other people living here?*" In such a situation, is the homeowner obliged to tell the truth to the convict?

In such a dreadful situation, the frightened homeowner (knowing that there are vulnerable people inside), has a number of morally justifiable options before him. Firstly, he could opt to remain silent and, although not answering the question, he could seek to distract the villain or to otherwise resolve the situation. Silence is always an option, especially when the person asking the question doesn't have a good intention, or has disregard for the sacredness and dignity of human life. Take our Lord Himself as an example. When He was brought before the odious Herod for questioning, Christ chose to remain absolutely silent (Lk. 23:6-12). Herod had no desire to listen to and embrace Gospel truth; he only hoped to see some sign done by Jesus. Likewise, in the example presented above, the homeowner could opt to remain silent.



# THE BLESSED VIRGIN: MARY MOTHER OF TRUTH / *continued*

If, however, the homeowner judges that to remain silent would likely provoke the convict further, what other moral options are open to him?

Firstly, the homeowner could disregard the violent convicts' question all together. The homeowner could say something like "*Go away! You are not coming in*" or "*I am not answering any of your questions, clear off!*" Not engaging with a question is clearly *not* the same as lying. However, once again, the homeowner might judge that this course of action is only likely to further aggravate or escalate an already dangerous situation. So, what else could the homeowner say?

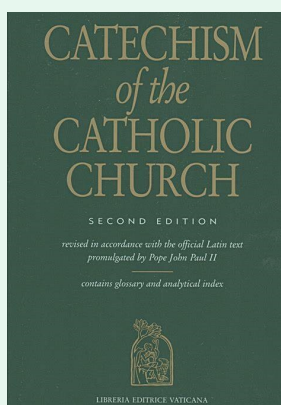
Well, it does us well to remember that no one has an unconditional right to the communication of truth. In many concrete situations, we are obliged to judge whether or not it is appropriate to reveal a given truth to someone who asks for it (*Cf. Catechism, §2488*). This is because – like the violent convict in our example – not everyone has chosen to conform their lives to the Gospel precept of fraternal love. So, there are plenty of circumstances in life when the inquirer (i.e. the person asking the question) doesn't have the right to certain knowledge, precisely because

they are not seeking the truth *as a good*, but rather *as a means* to inflict evil upon another.

It is helpful to know that it is both possible – and commendable – to withhold or to conceal all/part of the truth without being guilty of lying. How can one conceal the truth without telling a lie? The answer lies in what is known as a 'Mental Reservation' via amphibolous (ambiguous) statements.

Typically, four conditions must be in place for Mental Reservations to be considered permissible.

1. **If one is gravely bound, by upright duty, not to reveal the truth/a secret.**
2. **If one is asked to reveal something damaging about himself or others.**
3. **If the person asking the question is rash, improperly curious, indiscreet, or is probing purely personal/private matters**
4. **If the person making the mental reservation uses conventional/typical phrases which are generally recognised/accepted by society as containing the concealment of truth.**



CHARITY AND RESPECT FOR THE TRUTH SHOULD DICTATE THE RESPONSE TO EVERY REQUEST FOR INFORMATION OR COMMUNICATION. THE GOOD AND SAFETY OF OTHERS, RESPECT FOR PRIVACY, AND THE COMMON GOOD ARE SUFFICIENT REASONS FOR BEING SILENT ABOUT WHAT OUGHT NOT BE KNOWN OR FOR MAKING USE OF A DISCREET LANGUAGE....NO ONE IS BOUND TO REVEAL THE TRUTH TO SOMEONE WHO DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW IT, CATECHISM, §2489

# THE BLESSED VIRGIN: MARY MOTHER OF TRUTH / *continued*

In the example we have been using, therefore, if the homeowner opts to speak, he could use what is known as a ‘Mental Reservation’ (i.e. a statement/utterance which is ambiguous while not being false). To reiterate, a ‘Mental reservation’ refers to an act of the mind in which the person talking restricts the sense of the words he uses to a meaning which would be different from their obvious meaning. Mental Reservations can only be employed for a just cause, and are only permitted (i.e. they are only considered not to be lies) if a prudent man, on overhearing what was being said, could gather the intended meaning from the surrounding circumstances.

Here, ambiguous statements are used (i.e. statements which have several meanings). So, in the example above, imagine that the vulnerable people were hiding downstairs in the kitchen, and the homeowner responded to the violent convict’s question by saying “*no one is hiding upstairs*” or “*there’s no point searching here, there’s no one around*”. In such an instance, for a clearly reasonable cause, the homeowner is deciding to use a mental reservation to protect the lives of people, and he is doing so by uttering a statement that is deliberately ambiguous, but not strictly false. Although his Mental Restriction is clearly a *concealment of truth*, given his perilous circumstance, this is something that is not only

permitted, but would be judged as necessary and proper.

For those who might harbour doubts regarding the moral lawfulness of Mental Reservations (properly understood and exercised), it is helpful to know that, on occasions, for just reasons, Christ Himself had recourse to such methods ([Jesus said] “*Go to the feast yourselves; I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.*” So saying, He remained in Galilee. But after His brethren had gone up to the feast, then He also went up, not publicly but in private’ (Jn 7:8).

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***“THE REASON WHY GOD IS SO GREAT A LOVER OF HUMILITY IS BECAUSE HE IS THE GREAT LOVER OF TRUTH. NOW HUMILITY IS NOTHING BUT TRUTH, WHILE PRIDE IS NOTHING BUT LYING.”***

*St Vincent de Paul*

# PRACTICAL STEPS: *TRUTH-A LIGHT IN THE DARKER MOMENTS OF OUR LIVES /*

*Fr Gerard Mary OFM Conv.*

**I**t is not uncommon for people of faith to experience moments in which doubts and fears begin to prowl. It might be, for example, that a person who has given their life to God, looks around them and observes that everything seems to be falling apart; they can then begin to fear that their hopes for a fruitful and ordered life have been built on sand. In such moments, which are often characterised by a type of hopelessness, a person can easily succumb to forces which will, if left unchallenged, undermine their health, impair their ability to function properly and even endanger their vocation. Unless taken to Christ, such doubts and fears can begin to gnaw away, and if the right medicine isn't applied, these wounds can turn into abscesses of regret and can even lead to the desire to cut one's losses and run. This is *not* how Christ wishes His followers to live – this is not Gospel joy or Christian hope: such a mindset can attract no one to the Christian way of life. Remember, there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear (*1 John 4:18*) So, what can be done if a negativity or a sense of hopelessness has begun to creep into one's mind, family, religious order or diocese?

**Well, as soon as these thoughts and difficulties begin to arise, there is a 10-point survival kit that one must employ:**

1. **“Resist him, firm in your faith!”** (*1 Peter 5:9*): Recognise the lies of your adversary, the devil, for what they are! God doesn't want you to give up. God has never permitted you to enter a situation that He didn't intend to give you the grace to heal, to repair, to build-up and to help sanctify. Nothing is impossible for God. If the supernatural virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity are missing in your life, know that only God Himself can grant these to a soul, so ask your loving Father for them!
2. **“Christ is all, and in all”** (*Col. 3:11*): Make the Holy Eucharist, Christ Himself, the centre of your life. Recommit to faithfulness to one's daily Holy Hour, knowing that there is no situation in life beyond Christ's power to heal, redeem and restore. To ensure that you remain, always, in God's loving friendship, make sacramental confession a regular part of your life. Such confessions should be humble, well-prepared and simple. If you possess Christ, you possess everything!
3. **“He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him”** (*Prov. 30:5*): Spend at least fifteen minutes, each day, meditating upon and praying with Sacred Scripture. Learn to take shelter, comfort and solace in the word of God, drawing new hope for the day at hand.
4. **“Pray constantly”** (*1 Thes 5:17*): Pray, pray pray! Surrender all fears, doubts, troubles and worries to God's care: speak to God heart-to-heart, with all the simplicity and sincerity of a child. God hears every prayer, and He always answers. Never lose a moment to pray for someone or for a situation, and make continuous prayer as second-nature as humming a tune. Pray especially for those in your life who have become lukewarm, cynical, despondent or difficult. Pray for healing, for the liberating of souls and for the reclaiming of strongholds and ministries for Christ.

# PRACTICAL STEPS: *TRUTH-A LIGHT IN THE DARKER MOMENTS OF OUR LIVES /*

## *Continued*

5. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (*2 Cor. 3:17*): Begin or renew your friendship with God—the Holy-Spirit. With arms and hands outstretched, ask the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, for an abundance of the heavenly gifts that will be required if you are, with His help, to remedy the situations in your life, family, religious community or diocese that have become broken or dysfunctional. The Living Flame of God’s Love can enkindle even the coldest of hearts and bring new life where all was dim and judged to be utterly forsaken. Being the Giver of Life, wherever the Holy Spirit is invited, decay is turned to growth, and growth is brought to full-flowering.

6. “My vows to the Lord I will fulfil” (*Psalms 115[116]*): Do your daily duties faithfully, promptly and with love. It’s God Will that we do our part in order to bring His healing, holy renovation and renewal to our surroundings. Be faithful to the vows that you have taken before the Lord and His Holy People, and remember Our Lord’s words “*do not be anxious about tomorrow...let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day*” (Matt. 6:34). While we must plan responsibly for the future, we must never forget that our primary focus ought to be on doing what it is within our power and responsibility to do *today*. Do the very basics well, consistently and with faith, and everything else can be built upon this.



7. “I thank You for the wonder of my being” (*Psalms 138 [139]*): when enduring trials, anxieties, doubts and temptations, it is essential to remember that each of us are *a union* of body and soul. We must recognise, in our mortal bodies, the craftsmanship of God, and we must honour God’s creative goodness by respecting our bodies. To withstand the rigours of a spiritual trial, we must: eat well, take sufficient rest, make time for daily exercise, and give up behaviours and habits that damage the gift of our health, thus hindering our ability to function properly. Neglecting the gift of one’s health, not only shows ingratitude to God, but it also impairs our ability, as Christians, to fully witness the Good News of Our Lord and Saviour, Who died that we might have life, and have it in abundance (*John 10:10*).

# PRACTICAL STEPS: *TRUTH-A LIGHT IN THE DARKER MOMENTS OF OUR LIVES /*

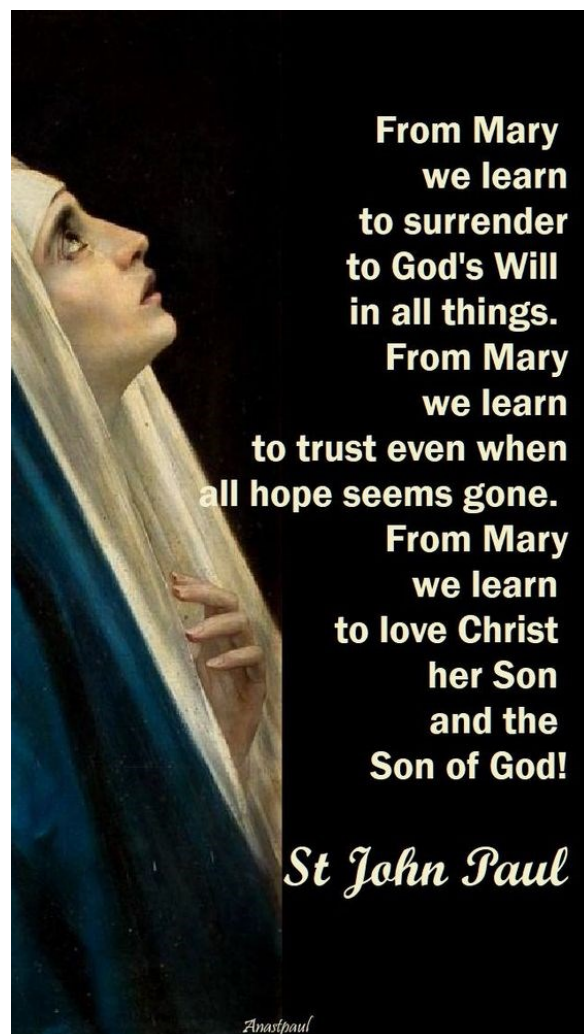
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8. **“Always give thanks to God the Father for everything”** (*Eph. 5:20*): when we find ourselves stuck in situations that depress or dishearten us, it is common to encounter the temptation to lash out, or to give way to expressions of bitterness or regret. Doing this, however, never helps to better the situation we find ourselves in, and no matter how understandable such a reaction might seem, it always reveals a type of spiritual shortsightedness: our attention has become focused *only* on the negative. We have disregarded the fact that our life has been – and continues to be – absolutely flooded with God’s grace with His tender blessings. So, the next time you feel yourself beginning to give into a morose hopelessness, go to a quiet place, take a series of deep breathes, and begin to pray, from the heart, thanking God for every blessing you have received. Be specific. Be sincere. Be open to recognising – and thanking God for – the blessings He has bestowed upon you.

9. **“in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father”** (*Matt. 18:10*): don’t forget that God has given each one of us a Guardian angel. Ask your Guardian angel to nudge you and remind you of things that you have forgotten to be thankful for! Ask your Guardian angel to sprinkle your daily path with holy inspirations and grace-filled recollections. If you have a tough day ahead of you, ask him to smooth the path. If you have a difficult conversation coming up, ask him to give you the right words.

Learn to rely upon your Heavenly friend, and don’t be afraid to ask him for advice, counsel and help.

10. **“Behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed”** (*Luke 1:48*): Consecrate yourself at the start of each new day, to Mary the Mother of God, the Mother of the Church, and our own Mother in the order of grace. Pray your daily Rosary from the heart, and bring our Lady, by the hand, into the most difficult, depressing and troublesome corners of your marriage, your religious life or your missionary field. Mary is Christ’s Perfect Disciple, let her teach you what to do, this very day, in the most perfect way.



# TRUTH: GRACE AND NATURE /

*Fr Jarek Zachariasz OFM Conv.*

**T**he desire to pursue the truth is a natural human need. This desire is deeply rooted in the heart and is the deepest requirement of human reason. Man's task is to explore the nature of the world around him, hence the classical definition that truth is: the conformity of existence (reality) with the mind. For this reason, modern man should be reminded that he has no 'copyright' on truth. He is not the one who *invents* it, he is not the one who *creates* it, and he is not the one who *makes* things true. Truth does not bow to ideology, it does not tremble before opinion polls, and truth does not find its identify and character via the majority opinion. The truth doesn't seek to flatter or to make her presence comfortable in someone's life, neither does she permit herself to be sold. The truth correponds perfectly to reality, as in a mirror, unshattered.

In this context, it is worth reminding ourselves that truth needs no other force to oblige us except itself. The documents of the Second Vatican Council teaches us that truth speaks by its own power (*cf. Dei Verbum and Dignitatis Humanae*). Hence, there is no greater crime against truth than to spread it by force. However, the mere conviction that the truth defends itself, or that sooner or later it will come to light, cannot absolve us from seeking it and, when necessary, protecting it, especially in these times – times which have been titled 'post-truth', so-called.

I am convinced that, as Christians, we have a particular duty to speak out for and to serve the truth. As St. John Paul II wrote:

*«It is her (the Church's) duty to serve humanity in different ways, but one way in particular imposes a responsibility of a*

*quite special kind: the diakonia of the truth. This mission on the one hand makes the believing community a partner in humanity's shared struggle to arrive at truth; and on the other hand it obliges the believing community to proclaim the certitudes arrived at, albeit with a sense that every truth attained is but a step towards that fullness of truth which will appear with the final Revelation of God: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully" (1 Cor 13:12)»*

(Fides et Ratio, §2)

Raised, as many of us have been, in the spirit of Western civilisation, we recall that, according to Greek and Roman philosophy, truth is related to a literary statement. Truth is an attribute of a grammatical sentence. We say, 'this sentence is true' or 'this sentence is false'. We say that someone told the truth or that he lied. Meanwhile, however, in Sacred Scripture, truth is an attribute not of a *grammatical construction* but of a *person*. It is not, primarily, *statements of words* which ought to be judged as being true or false, but rather it is a *person* who is either considered true or false. These two concepts of truth clash very sharply with each other in the conversation between Jesus and Pilate (who was, after all, a Westerner).



# TRUTH: GRACE AND NATURE /

## *Continued*

Therefore, in my meditation on truth, I have chosen to start from this conversation:

*«Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose, I was born, and for this purpose, I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.» (John 18:37)*

In this conversation, Pilate asked: "What is truth?" because, for him, truth was a feature of speech. Christ, meanwhile, says: "Everyone who is of the truth..." Jesus doesn't refer to people who *speak* the truth, but rather, of those who are 'of the truth'. It is common for us to reason this way when, for example, we say, "This is a true doctor". When we say such things as this, everyone knows that we are speaking about a doctor who seeks to heal and not kill. We also say: 'This is a true friend' or: 'This is a true Christian'. Similarly, Jesus said of St. Bartholomew: "Here is a true Israelite". Of course, the question of truth then becomes whether or not it is possible to say of myself: 'This is a true priest', 'This is a true Franciscan', or to speak of us, the baptised: 'These are the true Christians'?

From what has been presented above, it is possible to say that, in terms of Sacred Scripture, the opposite of truth is not so much 'lying', but rather the living of a double-life – or, in other words, the life of someone in whom there is no truth. The point is not whether he is telling the truth or lying.

The point is whether or not there is truth in him.



When Saint Perpetua was under house arrest before her martyrdom, her father came to her and urged her to leave the faith for the sake of her family and the child who needed her. She

answered him: 'Dad, do you see a vessel in this corner? It's a jug. Could you call it something else? The father replied: no because it is a jug. She said: 'I am who I am too. I cannot be someone else'. Perpetua could not call herself anything else but a Christian. This truth defined her life because a Christian is of the truth.

We, too, are Christians, and we know that the word 'Christian' comes from the Greek word 'christianoï' which means 'people who are Christ-like'. When one looks at Christians, one sees Jesus Christ. That is why answering the question of who Jesus is, is so important. In his conversation with Pilate, Jesus appears to us as King, High Priest and Prophet. These are the three sacred offices that Jesus shares with us in the sacrament of Baptism. In our discussion of truth, we are interested, especially, in the third of these offices: the prophetic office, which is also the mission we receive being 'christianoï':

# TRUTH: GRACE AND NATURE /

## *Continued*

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Jesus says to Pilate: 'For this purpose I was born, and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice'. Jesus bears witness to the truth, or to put it another way, he has an honest relationship with that truth, and in this, is manifested both His and our prophetic dignity. A prophet is someone who, as St John Paul II wrote, has a reliable attitude to the truth. A reliable (solid) attitude to the truth, i.e. a witness given to the truth. It is the truth visible not only from what someone says or writes, but it is the truth visible/discernible from how he lives. The truth we see is based not only on his words but also on his life and attitude.

**“I AM THE WAY THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE”**  
*JESUS CHRIST (JN14:6)*

The Book of Revelation calls Jesus - 'a Faithful Witness'. A witness to the truth is not someone who speaks or writes as I am doing right now. A witness to the truth is someone who shows the truth by his attitude. Jesus' witness to the truth was not in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' witness to the truth was on the hill of Golgotha. On Golgotha, Christ showed Himself to be what He had taught on The Mount of Beatitudes. On the Mount of Beatitudes, Jesus was a teacher, on the Mount of Golgotha, Jesus was a witness.

Likewise, St. Maximilian M. Kolbe. Had it not been for his witness at Auschwitz, had it not been for his martyrdom, Fr. Maximilian would have been venerated in our Order and the whole Church as a zealous priest, a pious religious, a highly active apostle of the Gospel and a devotee of the Immaculate Mary. His extraordinary ideas of using modern technical inventions to preach the Word of God would still be remembered, and perhaps his vision of the Knighthood of the Immaculate, which, as a Marian anti-Freemasonry publication, was to embrace the whole world, to work by word, example and prayer for its moral repair, would be revisited. In other words, Fr. Maximilian would have been remembered as being a good teacher, especially for his writings and preaching. However, at Auschwitz, he became a witness after the example of His Lord and Master, Christ Jesus. In the squalor of his starvation cell, Fr. Maximilian became a Faithful Witness to the truth. Interestingly, in fact, Fr. Maximilian was first beatified by Paul VI as a faithful believer, only for John Paul II to canonise him as a martyr.



# TRUTH: GRACE AND NATURE /

## *Continued*

Let us now turn to the next issue:

**'YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE'** (*John 8:32*).

During a conversation around our Friary table, a question arose:

1. Is every truth liberating?
2. Does the truth always set you free?
3. If so, is this liberation simple and automatic?

The answer to the above questions is: 'no'.

Christ says to those who have believed Him (and thus heard, accepted and embraced the truth He has spoken):

**'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'** (*John 8:31-32*).

The truth, therefore, only liberates those in whom the truth abides. It delivers the truth in which one dwells (settles). The Greek 'méneo' used here by John, means 'to abide', but also 'to dwell', 'to continue', and 'to endure'. The word has many meanings. However, it is certainly not a one-off experience. St John explains this logic as follows: one learns the truth if, and only if, one abides in Jesus' teaching. If, on the other hand, as Jesus said to certain Jews, 'my word finds no place in you' (*John 8:37*), then the result is an attempt to murder the Lord. The lie wants to murder the truth.

Truth, freedom, and goodness depend on accepting or rejecting Christ's teaching. It can't get any clearer. As Jesus Himself says 'Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil' (*Matt. 5:37*)

However, let us return once again to the questions posed above.

1. Is every truth liberating?
2. Does the truth always set you free?
3. If so, is this liberation simple and automatic?

The answer, as noted earlier, to the above questions is: 'no'.

To understand why, it is necessary to recall the passage in St. John's Gospel (*John 16:12-13*) where Jesus says: *'I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth'*.

A sign of Jesus' great love for us is that He does not speak truths to us that He knows we cannot yet bear. We must remember this too! Great attentiveness, consideration and charity is needed when we are speaking the truth to someone. We have to assess whether, at this precise moment in time, the person in question is capable of bearing the truth. In other words, it is not simply enough for us to understand the truth we speak, we have an added obligation to bear that truth, so that its proclamation and utterance doesn't break a person or wound needlessly. Many truths are difficult to bear.

# TRUTH: GRACE AND NATURE /

## *Continued*

In reference to words of Jesus in (*John 16:12-13*), Our Lord is telling us here that, in order to bear the truth, it is not enough to understand it. One still needs the Holy Spirit, and it is *only* in the Holy Spirit, in our surrendering to His action, and in our acceptance of His help, that we can bear the fulness of God's truth.

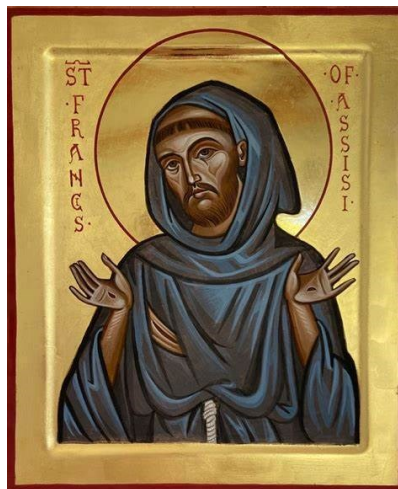
An example of a truth that we cannot bear without the help and action of the Holy Spirit is, first of all, the truth about our own sin (first and foremost!) and then, further, the truth about someone else's sin. Another brutal truth to bear is the truth about the sin of the Church, the sin of the community to which I belong, and the sin of a spouse in marriage. These are sometimes unbearable truths. To live with such truths, it is not enough that you understand them; you still need some Divine power that you do not have of yourself. You need some special Divine love that you do not have by yourself. By yourself, you cannot bear such truths.

Let us learn from Jesus such sensitivity! Jesus utters these words just before leaving the Upper Room, just before going to Gethsemane and then to the Passion and to the Cross. And in leaving His disciples, Jesus chooses not to tell them everything. He knows there will be time yet, and above all, a Spirit-filled time will lead them to this truth. But not now! This is great love, and we must learn such love from the Lord.

In conclusion to my reflection, it is sometimes worth reminding ourselves: You don't have to say everything. Leave room and time for the Holy Spirit to

work in the other person. The Word of God, which the person has already received, will work in him; he will grow into the truth, into the whole truth. Don't break the man, don't violate him. Don't put the kind of truth on him that will only serve to drive him into the ground!

My philosophy professor, Fr Jozef Tischner, used to say often. "You may be right, but what good is it?". Unfortunately, we all seldom think in terms of "good"; it is more common for us to think in terms of "right", truth, etc. And as Franciscans, we have a special duty to bind three things together: truth, peace and good. Truth and good must always go together.



St. Francis - the poverello of Assisi - never called God 'Right'; instead, he refers to Him as 'Good' in many texts. In "Adoration of the Most High God", he says: "You are the

Good, all Good, the Highest Good". In the introduction to the 'Lord's Prayer': "You, Lord, are the Supreme Good, the Eternal Good, from whom all good comes, without whom there is no good". In the collection of the "Prayers of Praise": "Almighty, most Holy, Supreme and greatest God, all good, Supreme Good, All Good, Who alone is Good!". It was the image of God - Who is Good - that made St. Francis a man of peace and of divine truth.

# TRUTH: GRACE AND NATURE /

## *Continued*

One last thought, which will hopefully bring together everything. Towards the beginning I wrote about the *truth-man* as opposed to the *truth-sentence*. Let us look at the following two passages from Sacred Scripture:

When He had spoken these things, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to the Jews who believed Him: "If you abide in my teaching, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

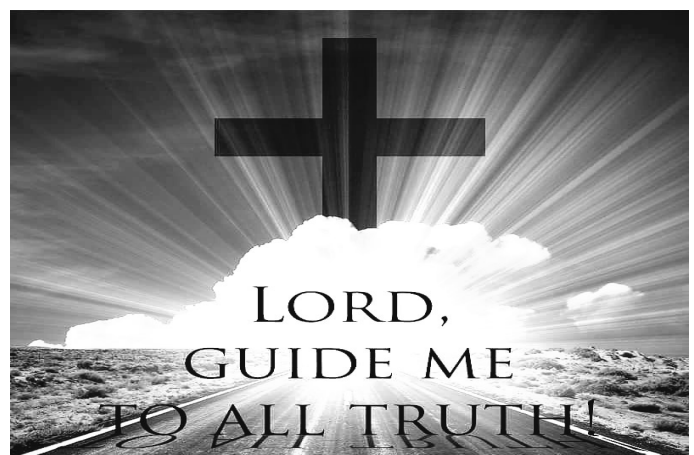
But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will lead you into all truth (John 16:13).

Christ was explaining to His disciples that sin is a lie. As mentioned above, when Scripture speaks of truth and falsehood, it does not deal with the value of human words. Truth and falsehood refer to the whole man as either true or false. And sin makes man cease to be what he is supposed to be. I am a priest, but I am I a true priest? Do I live in such a way that I deny my calling? Am I faithful to my priesthood? I am called to be a father, but I am really one? Other men might ask similar questions: I am a husband, but am I worthy of the name? I am a person's friend, but do I deserve to be called that? You see, sin makes us all walking contradictions, an incarnate untruth. Even if I am not physically dead, neither am I truly alive. Such a life becomes a hell in itself. Here, Macbeth's wife comes to mind, who is trying to wash the nonexistent blood off her hands. She is just such a walking corpse.

Meanwhile, the Spirit will lead us to the whole truth. When? When that truth

becomes mine. When it becomes my most profound conviction, my inner conviction, then when I love it. Only then will I be led to the whole truth because the truth, in this sense, is complete, that it is the truth of my person. While the Scriptures are the truth, the point is that I become true when I believe them. Once again, let us repeat: truth is an attribute of a person. Jesus says He is the truth, and "everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). When the truth is mine, it is within me. Then I am in the fullness of truth. And I am not in the fullness of truth as long as there are such fragments of truth outside myself.

What good is it that Jesus said the Word if I don't believe it if it's not part of me? His Word is not yet put into me by the Spirit. The Spirit has not succeeded in bringing the whole Word into me. So all the work goes in this direction, so I accept this Word in its entirety. Then, too, this Word will heal me: just me, the sinner. Saint Gregory the Great said: "You have a prescription (Scripture), beautiful, excellent, the best it can be, written by the best Physician, but so what if you do not trust Him? This prescription will not help you if you do not trust the Doctor."



# TWO FRANCISCAN MARTYRS OF THE TRUTH / *Friar Peter George Flynn OFM Conv.*

**T**he Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, spoke of liberty as the condition necessary for man to seek the Truth without obstacle or encumbrance. The Declaration states quite plainly that there is '*only one true religion*,' which '*subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus committed the duty of spreading it abroad among all men.*' The Declaration does not say anything along the lines of '*you seek your truth and I seek mine*.' Instead, it teaches that once the truth of Christ's saving message is found, the seeker is 'bounden' to hold fast to it a treasure it above all things. Nevertheless, this truth cannot be forced upon anyone: '*The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power.*' Or, as the old adage goes, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.

One of the reasons why the Second Vatican Council felt 'bounden' to proclaim the necessity of religious freedom, was the rise of totalitarian states which denied freedom to their enslaved masses, for fear that free-enquiry would lead their thralls to realise their regimes were built, not on truth, but upon lies. A government which inhibits religious practice is one which has gone beyond the limits of its power. In a word, governments are to uphold rights which are God-given, not to legislate them out of existence.

One great man who lived in a time when the state did coerce its subjects in matters of religion was the Lord chancellor of England, St. Thomas More.

Some had deemed such coercion necessary so as to preserve the fragile social order (i.e. through religious conformity). However, not without regret, More had predicted a time when religious pluralism would be a necessary condition of life for Catholics: '*I pray God that some of us, as high as we seem to sit upon the mountains treading heretics under our feet like ants, live not the day that we gladly would wish to be at league and composition with them to let them have their churches quietly to themselves, so that they would be contented to let us have ours quietly to ourselves.*'



According to a longstanding tradition, More was a professed member of the Third Order of St. Francis, and he could already perceive the early stirrings of a state which was eager to encroach upon matters which really concerned God and His church; one of the targets of this overreaching state would be the human conscience. The totalitarian oaks of the twentieth century were inchoate in the sixteenth century acorns of the Tower, the rack, and the headsman's axe.

# TWO FRANCISCAN MARTYRS OF THE TRUTH /

## *Continued*

More gave up a glittering political career and the financial security which this brought him rather than consent to Henry VIII's break with the Pope. However, he never explicitly revealed his true feelings regarding the political situation either. As long as he could keep silent, no-one could accuse of committing treason. This is not the sinful kind of silence where a person refuses to warn a potential victim that a crime is planned against him. More was not keeping quiet at a time when he needed to speak out, for he had been writing for years about the truth of the Catholic Faith, the dangers of heresy, and corruption of politicians, so no-one could ever accuse him of lead weak souls astray by his silence. But he would not accept the new order of things. Once the jury had declared him guilty and he was sentenced to death, More could at least freely proclaim the truth that 'no temporal man can be head of the spirituality', and he gave his life for this truth. He fully embodied the belief, ratified four centuries later at Vatican II, that man '*perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience*' – acknowledging those imperatives to the bitter end.

An example of a Franciscan friar who, like More, stood for the Truth by maintaining a dignified silence in the face of, not one, but two totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century was Friar Szalez Kiss. An Observant Franciscan in Hungary, he had already come under government scrutiny for his role in rescuing Jews after the 1944 invasion of his homeland by the Third Reich. He founded a youth group called the Christian Democratic Youth Association. This organisation prevented the Communist regime from gaining the hearts and minds of the youth, and so they decided to destroy Fr. Szalez Kiss

and his youth group through the spreading of lies. Fr. Szalez was arrested by the Communist police on a trumped-up charge of inciting his students to massacre Soviet soldiers, having promised them absolution in advance.

Of course, any Catholic worth their salt, knows that a person cannot be absolved in advance of committing a sin. It never happens, simply because the Sacrament of Reconciliation is for repairing the damage caused by sin, and what the ignorant Communists had falsely accused the brave Franciscan of doing was of using a travesty of the Sacrament to instigate sin. In the face of such lies, the friar used the same tactic against the totalitarians as More had used against the Tudors: silence. He was beaten severely in order to get him to break silence and – even worse – break the seal of the confessional. But break Father Szalez did not. After a mock trial, he was executed on the 10th of December 1946 at Sopronkőhida gaol.

There is an old Malay saying which says, the three things which cannot be hidden are the sun, the moon, and the truth. Yet the Truth, which is an attribute of the invisible God, can only be made visible in the world through our words and actions, just as it was made visible two thousand years ago in the Incarnation. The Incarnate Lord has no arms, no feet, no hands on earth but ours – and he only has our human testimony to convince men and women of the Truth which He commanded to be preached to all nations. These martyrs are but two of a great number of Franciscans who shed their blood in the defence of truth in the face of the endless succession of totalitarian Pilates who sneeringly repeat the same question over and over throughout history: 'What is Truth?'

# TRUTH: A PRAYER POEM /

*Fr. Gerard Mary OFM Conv.*

O God, help me to see the truth;  
bring me to know,  
and feel,  
and understand,  
the way things really are.

Help me to cast aside refracted light,  
and chase away distorted views.

Help me to rightly judge all things,  
and save me from the shipwreck of half-truths.

Guide me past the pull of cruel temptation,  
and safeguard, for me, the grace of my salvation.

Help me to see, with rectitude of sight,  
what stands before my eyes.

Help me to know, with certitude,  
the quality of my thoughts,  
that I may faithfully weigh their worth  
and cast aside all that would stain.

Stop, O Lord, my heart from tending off the path of life and grace,  
and let the beauty of your truth, My God,  
free me through the bonds of Your embrace.