How many legs would a dog have if you called a tail a leg? Four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg. *Abraham Lincoln.* **The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those that speak it.** *George Orwell*

November 17th **The Shofar** **Truth**

I Am The Way, The Truth and The Life

While each of these three claims may appear to be simple, and reasonably straightforward they are incredibly profound and life transforming. For instance, in saying that He is ***the* Way**, Jesus asserts that He is the ***only* Way.** He emphasizes this by plainly stating in the next sentence, *No one comes to the Father except through me* (**Jn 14:6b**). The implication is clear: every other path is ultimately a dead end. Similarly, in stating that He is the life, Jesus claims that He is life itself —its very source and aim. Jesus is not only Lord of eternal life but is himself the perfect manifestation of life to the fullest (**Jn 10:10**).

What is Truth?

During his trial, Pilate asked Jesus, *What is truth*? (**Jn 18:38**). Philosophers have been seeking answers to this question for millennia as its answer is fundamental to the way we understand ourselves and the role we play in creation. The answer shapes how we live, how others live and how we build harmonious human communities. As Plato remarks: *Truth is the beginning of every good thing, both to gods and men; and he who would be blessed and happy, should be from the first a partaker of the truth.*

Without Truth there is only impenetrable darkness with people going their own way according to ***truths*** of their own making. But those truths cannot bring harmony and cannot live as the creatures God created us to become. Thus, it is that we all yearn for Truth. Once discovered, Truth orders the whole of our lives. We are bound by it and we shape our every word and deed according to it. It is only when men and women live according to alternative versions of the ***truth*** (small "t" truth) that human communities begin to suffer and to struggle.

It is **Truth** which helps us to see the world through the eyes of God rather than through human made filters – race, gender etc.

Truth is needed so that people may live in love and in harmony and according to justice. Indeed, **Truth** is a prerequisite for love and trust among individuals. To cite St. Aquinas, *it would be impossible for men to live together, unless they believed one another, as declaring the truth one to another.* Thus, justice cannot exist if it does not proceed from a genuine, enduring Truth. For Aquinas, "truth is a part of justice."

Starting from this understanding of Truth is vital because our human nature, which has been weakened by original sin, can all too easily succumb to the temptation that leads to the adoption of more palatable ***truths***, easier and less demanding ***truths***…*they exchange the truth about God for a lie* (**Rom 1:25**).

This is the situation in which we find ourselves today, trying to live the Gospel in a world seduced by relativism and scepticism, where every person's ***truth*** is as good and as "***true***" as any other. It is for this reason the Spirit of God calls upon us to teach the world ***The* Truth**. We are to challenge all alternative views of what it means to be a person, the reason we are here on the earth and the fundamental meaning of being humans in a human community.

The next step for Christian communities and individual disciples of Christ is to take up the words of the Ethiopian eunuch in **Acts 8:31**…*how can I find* ***The Truth****, unless someone guides me?* Therein lies the seeds for all missionary ministries. We are called upon to challenge these alternatives and proclaim by word and by deed Jesus as ***The* Truth** for all.

Jesus as the Truth

The good news for us is that God does not leave us to work all of this out on our own. God sent in His light — *The true light, which enlightens everyone* (**1:9**) — to overcome the darkness. (**Jn 1:5**) This light of **Truth** is Jesus Christ, for He is *full of grace and truth* (1:14). Both grace and **Truth** come through Him. (**1:17**) and it is in Him that all **Truth** is revealed.

The Bible reveals to us how things really are. Holy Scripture attests that God's words (Prov 8:7) and laws (Ps 119:142) are **True**. Indeed, the whole of Scripture proclaims how God is the source of all **Truth**. From a Christian perspective, **Truth** is to be understood as the only reliable way of viewing reality.

God is the source of all **Truth**, a reality made clear to us in the creation narrative. God created everything ***out of nothing***, via His word. As Genesis states, God pronounced *Let there be* and so it was. For instance, God said, *Let there be light; and there was light*. (**Gen 1:3**) These pronouncements are often referred to as being "performative utterances". This means they are statements that do something, and it is by these actions, reality is altered. After the command of God: *let there be*, reality was transformed and by the spoken command, something happened. "Light" happened. The existing reality (nothing) was changed and became something (creation). That is how divine words work.

It is for this reason that John's Gospel begins with an echo of Genesis' creation narrative. Jesus Christ is the divine creative Word through Whom *All things came into being* (Jn 1:3). Whenever He speaks, things happen — that is, His words are performative utterances. When He heals, He truly heals. When He forgives, He truly forgives. And when He says, *This is my body [. . .] this is my blood, (*Mt 26:26, 28; Mk 14:22, 24; Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:24-25) the bread and wine become His body and blood. Jesus' words and actions transform reality — indeed, restore reality in accord with the **Truth**.

Jesus is not someone who just teaches **Truth**. He *is* **Truth** itself. In Him, ***the* Truth** became flesh and dwelt among us. (cf. Jn 1:14) He affirms this by proclaiming *I am the way, and the truth, and the life* (**Jn 14:6**) Jesus is the ultimate Truth-maker.

This is why it is profoundly important that Jesus declares Himself as ***the* Truth** by means of an "***I am***" saying. In echoing **Exodus 3:14** He is taking the divine name to Himself, explicitly asserting His eternal and unchanging self-existence. He is the beginning and the end, (**Rev 21:6, 22:13**) and through Him all things are sustained by His powerful word (**Heb 1:3**) which is **Truth**. Indeed, Jesus is **Truth** itself, the One upholding all reality in existence, giving meaning and importance to all we do. He alone makes sense of why we are here and where we are heading. As such, He promises that all who believe in Him shall not remain in darkness (**Jn 12:46**). He is ***The* Truth** of creation and with Him we have the Way through darkness, an anchor in the midst of the harshest of storms. With this **Truth** as the foundation on which we build our lives, nothing will shake us.

Truth vs relative truth

But that is not an easy way to live in today's world. We are amid a battle for **Truth** over "my own" truth. This is evident in the writing of no less than the U. S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy. He declared how *at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life*. In one compound sentence, he has articulated one of the most intractable of opponents to the Good news. It takes us back to Adam and Eve in the Garden, to the hubris of the Tower of Babel.

In **John 8:32**, Jesus sets down the importance of knowing ***the Truth***, of committing ourselves to be living ***The Truth***… *and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*. This statement teaches us in no uncertain terms that there is a single, objective **Truth** which can be known and that this **Truth** has the power to liberate us from the chaos and confusion of the world — and, more importantly, from our sin and rebellion against the God of **Truth**.

Relax! Let God's Truth fortress our lives

Maturing as a Christian involves desiring God's Truth, not designing our own. This desire to cling to "my truth" is not new. Like Adam and Eve, we can insist it's our right to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil—to decide what's right and good and what's not. By so doing, we place ourselves in the arrogant position of defining ***Truth***. But we are most certainly not creators of **Truth**. As Christians we believe *God* is the **True** and faithful One. We should be consumed with him and ***His Truth***, not our own. But it is not going to be without opposition.