



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



### **Truth in Tolerance; Truth Intolerance**

Homily to the Priory School

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Over the weekend, I was asked to read for the second time a document composed in 1988 by a team of bishops at the Vatican entitled “THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF EDUCATION IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL: GUIDELINES FOR REFLECTION AND RENEWAL.” Now, with a title like that, you know there’s no sense waiting for the movie to come out. So if I wanted to know what VATICAN CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION was in fact saying about religious education, I knew I’d just have to buckle down and read it...and I’ll just admit straight off that this is not the sort of stuff I would be inclined to pull off the shelf and browse through on a sunny Saturday morning—or a rainy Monday afternoon, or any other time of day or meteorological condition. But I did read it, and now that I have read it, I’m glad I did, because hidden deep down in that document among terms like “systematic framework” and “philosophical heritage” is a little list of criteria that are, according to our bishops, is the criteria that define our unique perspective as a Catholic school. And these include:

1. respect for those who seek the truth
2. confidence in our ability to attain the truth
3. the ability to judge between what is true and what is false
4. and the knowledge that the fullness of that truth is contained in the Gospel message itself

So after I finished this letter from the bishops, I was talking about it with one of our alumni, and he says to me, “You know, what makes Priory unique—perhaps unique in the world” he says, “is that we do not teach the arts and sciences as though they were separate from our faith. Our Catholicism,” he says, “is integral to our understanding of everything else. Our faith is the lens through which we learn.” Now this is a guy with degrees from Duke, Oxford, Notre Dame, and Harvard, so when he says, “unique in the world,” he speaks with more authority than...say...me. So I felt that was something I really needed to think about.

And I was still thinking about what he said, and what the bishops said, when I came across this passage from Saint Paul that we heard in our first reading: “Teach and urge these things,” he says. Teach what? Well, he’s talking about the truth of gospel. Easy enough. But then he goes on: “whoever teaches something different and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the religious teaching...understands nothing...” Well...that is where it stops being so easy. “Who ever does not agree with the sound words of our Lord...understands nothing...” You know, when you read a passage like this in the Bible, it’s hard not to cringe. Because, as a Catholic teacher, I want you to respect all those who seek the truth. But at the same time, I also want you to be able to judge between what is true and what is false. I don’t want you to wind up one of those people, who, in the words of Saint Paul, “understands nothing.” So when you come across something false, I want you to be able to identify it. To call a spade a spade: To say “The gospel is true but that is false.”



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But “what,” we ask, as Pontius Pilate asked 2000 years ago “is the truth?” And the answer is straight from Jesus himself: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” he says, “for this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.” When it says in today’s gospel that Jesus “journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news,” that’s what he’s saying. That’s what he’s teaching. It’s what I have to teach you, and it’s what you have to teach the world. Anything less than the gospel truth is, in the words of Saint Paul, “envy, rivalry, insults, evil suspicions, and mutual friction among people with corrupted minds, who are deprived of...the truth.” So I’m here to tell you, on behalf of two thousand years of Catholic teaching, on behalf of Thomas Aquinas, Augustine of Hippo, Mother Teresa, Francis of Assisi, the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, and your pious, rosary rattling grandmother that there is such a thing as the truth. And it’s not just “true for you” or “true for me.” It’s true for everyone and for all time, and that truth is the gospel message as preserved, proclaimed, and passed down by the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Now we live in an age and in a culture that places a very high value on tolerance. Well and good. “The themes of peace and tolerance,” says Pope Benedict “are of vital importance in a world where rigid attitudes so often give rise to misunderstanding.” But if perhaps, the word itself has grown a little tired, understand that you can’t blame people for being so devoted to it. In a society that has dumped all its other convictions, tolerance is the last virtue some people have left to hold on to. So encourage tolerance, respect it, and embrace it. But beware of a kind of fanatical tolerance—a militant fundamentalist tolerance, if you will—that insists on tolerance above all else. A kind of false tolerance (which we call relativism) that defines itself as the willingness to accept everyone’s opinions as equally valid. If you buy into this brand of tolerance, then even Jesus himself begins to look like a pretty shady character. He wasn’t, after all, very tolerant of the Scribes and Pharisees...and while he gets good marks for eating with them, one can’t ignore the fact that he kept telling them to change.

So tolerance, properly defined, is not a willingness to acknowledge all “truths” as equally valid, but a willingness to allow false opinions, false religions, false doctrines to exist in favor of a greater good, which is human freedom. Because man must be free to seek the truth on his own terms—even when those terms are flawed.

And yet, ironically, you will be told again and again in the name of tolerance that there is no such thing as The Truth. You will be told this in college and in the workplace, in the media and in the classroom, at dinner parties, pep rallies, poker games, picnics, dance clubs, chat rooms, ballrooms and barbeques that there is no Truth with a capitol “T”, only “your truth” and “my truth” and “how dare you insist that your cultural/moral/ethical values are better than...” such and such and so forth and so on. And if, after all this, you manage to stick to your guns. If, in spite of everything, you insist that there is an ultimate Truth and that this Truth is preserved and infallibly taught by the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church...well, then you will be labeled INTOLERANT—a closed-minded, small-souled, narrow, fundamentalist bigot, which, in this country and your social stratum, is just about the worst thing anyone can call anybody.



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But you know, “we brought nothing into the world, and we won’t be taking anything out of it.” Ultimately, all you have is your soul. So “you, man of God, avoid all that. Instead, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Compete well for the faith. Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called when you made the noble confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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### Reading 1

[1 Tm 6:2c-12](#)

Beloved:

Teach and urge these things.

Whoever teaches something different  
and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ  
and the religious teaching  
is conceited, understanding nothing,

and has a morbid disposition for arguments and verbal disputes.

From these come envy, rivalry, insults, evil suspicions,  
and mutual friction among people with corrupted minds,  
who are deprived of the truth,

supposing religion to be a means of gain.

Indeed, religion with contentment is a great gain.

For we brought nothing into the world,  
just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it.

If we have food and clothing, we shall be content with that.

Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation and into a trap  
and into many foolish and harmful desires,  
which plunge them into ruin and destruction.

For the love of money is the root of all evils,  
and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith  
and have pierced themselves with many pains.

But you, man of God, avoid all this.

Instead, pursue righteousness, devotion,  
faith, love, patience, and gentleness.

Compete well for the faith.

Lay hold of eternal life,  
to which you were called when you made the noble confession  
in the presence of many witnesses.

### Gospel [Lk 8:1-3](#)

Jesus journeyed from one town and village to another,  
preaching and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God.  
Accompanying him were the Twelve  
and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities,  
Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,  
Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza,



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Susanna, and many others  
who provided for them out of their resources.