

### False Prophets

When I was a student in Rome, Thursday was our day-off and we'd often go out of the city to explore different places nearby. I'll never forget going into a magnificent, mediaeval church with an eye-catching mosaic high-up over the altar. It depicted Christ the Good Shepherd, preaching to his disciples, all sat at his feet eagerly listening. But when you got a bit closer, something about the mosaic seemed odd. Why was it that Christ's robes were not white but dirty-brown? Why were his listeners laughing, some drinking, everyone clearly having a good time? One was fox dressed up as a bishop. It was only when you stood underneath the mosaic that the dreadful truth slowly dawned on you. This was not Christ at all! It was the False Prophet, Lucifer, the so-called Light-Bearer, the one who looks like Christ, but is anything other.

BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS WHO COME TO YOU DISGUISED AS SHEEP BUT UNDERNEATH ARE RAVENOUS WOLVES. We inhabit a noisy, busy, celebrity culture with many experts competing for our attention. Yet in today's Gospel, Jesus urges us to be critical, discerning, to sift truth from falsehood, to be sensible people, building our homes not on sand but on the rock of truth. We rightly ask: What is true? How can we be sure we have the Truth? Where can we go to find it? We believe Jesus Christ is the truth. He is God the Son Incarnate, Humanity's Teacher. He reveals the Truth about God and about life. But how can we be sure even it is really HIM, it really IS his Word, it really IS what he teaches? In 1stR, St. Paul gives us two criteria. ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED BY GOD he says. To know Christ's teaching, we can turn to the Word of God in the Bible. Yet, as we know, the Bible can mean different things to different people. So Paul adds another criterion: KEEP TO WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN TAUGHT. In other words, we have to read the Bible but within the Tradition, or we will end up with a subjective opinion not the Truth Christ intended. But then there's more. The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum, adds a third element: "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form [the Bible] or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone." So to know the Truth, we must consult the Bible AND Tradition as interpreted by the Church's authority. This triad of Scripture-Tradition-Magisterium gives us the rock or theological ground on which as Catholics we can build our home.

This Year, the Church has asked us to keep a Year of Faith, to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the Catechism. The Catholic Church is now 20 centuries old. But in her history, she has never before passed through a busy, affluent, secular culture like ours today. We now know what happens when she does: Mass attendance declines; families break up; parishes are clustered; faith for many becomes a hobby, something to dip in-and-out-of. It's not the brand that's faulty here; after all, Christ IS the Way, the Truth and the Life! It's the culture we live in, which needs baptising. Let's not be naive about this. A key reason for attrition is a crude lack of awareness of the corrosive nature of contemporary culture, along with a sad neglect of our Catholic distinctiveness, of the beauty of our Christian faith, and of what the Church can offer. This is why the Year of faith is a grace-filled opportunity. It's not easy to be a disciple today, to be a Catholic, let alone, to be a Catholic teacher or a Catholic priest. This is because we inhabit a challenging cultural context

Let me give you an image, one I'm sure you've heard before. A few years ago, I was on holiday in Scotland and saw an amazing sight: thousands of wild salmon in a river, swimming upstream, racing ahead, jumping in the air to get past the rocks and over the boulders. Salmon, I am told, lay their eggs upstream, and once hatched, the new salmon swim down to the sea on a huge journey to the feeding-grounds off Greenland.

They then have two months to get back to the river they were born in, to lay their own eggs and after to die. How on earth they know their home-river is a mystery, but that's why you see the amazing sight of fish swimming upstream, jumping in the air, racing ahead against the current. It made me think of two things. That WE are a bit like salmon. Deep down in every human heart is a spiritual homing-device. We are made for God and made for heaven. Our home is in him, and our hearts are restless until we find him. But secondly, to find him, to find Him in our busy, affluent, secular culture, we must swim upstream against the current. To find God, to develop a friendship with him, to live the life of Christ, to reach heaven our home, we have to be countercultural, to be different, to create space and time, to make the effort, even to suffer.

KEEP TO WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN TAUGHT AND KNOW TO BE TRUE. In this Mass today, as Catholic educators in a secular culture, let us ask God for the grace to persevere and to remain faithful. We ask Him too to bless the children and parents of our schools where we serve. Like Christ our Master, the Church will not be popular. We are countercultural people. We are swimming against the current. But let's remember: it is not the product that is defective but the ability of people in today's culture to receive it. This is why we need enormous creativity if we are to find new ways of spreading the Faith, effectively engaging with the new generations of 21C. So in this Mass, in which our of love Christ lays down his life for us, let us pray to the Holy Spirit that he will shower upon us his many gifts. Thus rooted in the Heart of Jesus, may we all be well-equipped to face the exciting challenges ahead