



*A lie can travel halfway around the world, while the truth is putting on its shoe.*

*What is truth?* These words of Pontius Pilate that we hear every holy week always capture my attention since we all seek for truth and it can be so very elusive. The news of this past week has been quite discouraging. The State of New York, under the direction of Governor Andrew Cuomo has passed a bill that creates a massive expansion of access to abortion in the state, including lifting restrictions on third-trimester abortions, allowing non-doctors to perform the procedure, and enshrining a fundamental right to “terminate a pregnancy” in New York state law.

I know people have strong feelings about pro-life and pro-choice. Some people, fairly or not, accuse the Catholic Church of talking too much about life in the womb and not enough about the life among the poor, the immigrants, and the most vulnerable; other Catholics feel that the church speaks too much about these topics and not enough about the right to life. I find that the Gospel of Jesus Christ calls believers to be concerned about all these most serious issues. Immigration rights, racism, concerns for the less fortunate, and issues that concern the beginning and end of life are all significant to our faith and its practice.

Last month, Sen. Kamala Harris of California (who has announced that she is seeking the Democratic Party’s nomination for the presidency) and Sen. Mazie Hirono of (Hawaii, both on the Senate Judiciary Committee, questioned a judicial nominee about his membership in the Knights of Columbus and whether it would affect his ability to fairly judge cases. I am a proud Knight of Columbus. I know best the work of the Hartigan Council: they raise money for those in need, distribute food at Thanksgiving, and donate their time and talent to our parish blocks party. These two senators want to paint the Knights as a radical organization. The Knights are no more radical than any Catholics who hold to the

Then, we experienced the story of the Covington Catholic School students (it is an all boy school) who came to Washington for the Pro-life March. Initially, it was reported that they boys were had verbally abused and blocked an elder Native American Vietnam Veteran who simply want to play his native instrument as form of prayer and culture. Some of the young men were wearing *MEGA* hats (Make America Great Again: the campaign theme of President Trump). The students were also accused of shouting racist chants. All of these initial accounts were based on a two minute video. Much of the media, including pundits who were both liberal and conservative, Catholic Church officials, including the principal of Covington Catholic High School and local Bishop condemned the actions of these young men. Some of the students, their parents and the school itself received death threats. A day of school had to be cancelled. Some actors and commentators said they would like to punch the kids in the face, have the school burned with the students it, and one movie director said the kids should be put in a woodcutter. I guess their norms about school bullying but adults to teens did not apply in this case.

By the next day, several hours of video had been viewed by many people. What was clear was that an adult group named the Black Hebrew Israelites had chanted vile and disgusting words at the high schooler, including homophobic and racial slurs. Eventually, Nathan Philips, the Native American, came and approached one of the boys, Nick Sandmann, and stood several inches from him and played his drum, Sandmann just stood and starred at Philips (some say he smirked). Mr. Philips is a veteran (he did not serve in Vietnam as he has claimed but God bless him for his service to our nation).

Some media people, upon seeing and learning about these further videos, apologized, some withdrew their tweets, and others, including the Catholic Bishop of Lexington, said that the students were wrong to wear MEGA hats. They believe such hats cause hurt and pain to others. What is truth of this situation?

Having taught high school young men for the years, I know that some can be compassionate, immature, mean, and kind, all within minutes of each action. Although teens should be held to high standards, I think adults should have a

much higher bar for acting maturely. I believe this situation flowed from the very strong feelings in our nation about President Trump. They also were colored by the division in this country over abortion.

Is wearing a *Make America Hat Great* again wrong? I understand the great animosity that many people feel toward Donald Trump. We think of the recent government shutdown and the suffering of the laid off workers. Some of his words and actions are extremely disturbing to me. I do not seek to be an apologist for the President. However, have we as American moved to the point that free speech is no longer tolerated? Would we condemn a person for wearing a *Black Lives Matter* tee shirt or a pro-choice hat? I hope not. We may or may not agree with the sentiments that one expresses, but I hope the core American value of freedom of speech is always protected.

These students had several strikes against them: they wore MEGA hats; they were Catholic; they were at pro-life March. It is tolerated to be Catholic, but please do not express a view about law or culture that is out of step with what others feel about such issues. Essential to being a Catholic is how we treat others. The Catholic Church has been in the forefront in this country in seeking to protect immigrants, the vulnerable, the poor, and the unborn.

What is truth? What I wrote is doubt colored by my feelings and beliefs. It is rare that anyone can be totally objective in matters of faith, morality, and politics. What I do believe to be the truth of this matter is that these young students were unjustly caught in the midst of a culture divide in our country. We must seek to get the facts and information about issues to the best of our abilities before making judgments. I have found that is not easy to do.

What is truth? *The one who says he/she loves God and hates his neighbor is a liar (First Letter of John.* Can you or I respect, seek to understand and even love somewhat with whom we disagree with on matters that are very important to us? Can we listen to each other? Can we slow our tendency to quick judgments? By the grace of God we can try.