

21 March 2021, The Fifth Sunday of Lent: Psalm 51:7

I recently conducted an objective, scientific study. First, I documented every lie, deception, and half-truth told by politicians and advertisers during the last 100 years. Then, I assigned the value of one inch to each lie, deception, and half-truth and multiplied by the total number. I found that the lies, deceptions, and half-truths would stretch to Saturn and back to earth 16.7 times. Of course, I never did such a study. You are likely not all that shocked by my admission; we live in a culture of duplicity.

To be fair the deception is not just 'out there', with marketers and politicians. We are cozy with *self*-deception. Consider "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas!" The slogan implies one can leave behind normal life, participate in debaucheries of one's choice and come back as if nothing happened, completely unaffected except by the "fun." This is an absolute lie. Everything we experience, especially the negative, addictive, and compulsive affects our bodies, minds, and souls for good or ill.

There is a psychological term for profound self-deception: it is called disassociation. To disassociate is to "break a connection, to separate, disunite." From a psychological and spiritual point of view disassociation is the "breaking apart of consciousness into separate units." We have amazingly flexible minds. We can lie to ourselves, and know we are lying to ourselves, and lie to ourselves anyway. We simply disassociate.

Today we are confronted with a contrast to self-deception. The Psalmist exclaims: *For behold, you (God) look for truth deep within me and will make me understand wisdom secretly* (51:7). The truth within is what God is looking for and that can frighten us because our deep truth is not altogether pleasing. We are absurd jumbles of nobility and savagery, love and hate, goodness and evil, caring and callousness. It is hard to look at the whole truth about oneself and mostly we do not or pretend we do not.

We fear the other, dark self. We doubt God would forgive us if He knew the whole truth. We cannot quite believe God's loves and mercy are greater than our sins. It is not easy to dig through layers of repressed guilt and fear, through the bulwarks of alibi and self-justification. Yet vulnerability is the pathway to freedom. Consider Jesus' adversaries—the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes. They were morally impeccable, religiously scrupulous, and ideologically pure; yet they were blind and deaf to God's salvation. Why? Because those who judge themselves morally impeccable, religiously scrupulous, and ideologically pure do not need God.

What a collection of human disasters followed Jesus: the illegitimate, unwise, and unwashed; the grieving, lonely, and alienated; the reprobates, jailbirds, and sinners; the idiots, misfits, and screw-ups. With Jesus they found they could face the truth about themselves: first, that they could not heal or save themselves; only God saves. Second, that God could and would heal, restore, and save if He were sought. And third, that the way to healing and salvation is through surrender to God of the truth within them, whatever that truth is.

Do you believe these three truths? If you only *want to believe* these things, you are taking the first step of true repentance. Here are ways to practice true repentance towards healing.

- 1) Do not fear. Jesus' mercy is greater than all human sin. Give your fear to God.
- 2) Face your truth in community. This is not "self-help" but growing in Christ with other truth seekers supporting us, praying for us.
- 3) Surrender to God every sinful thought, word, action, and intent quickly. Do not toy with or examine them. Surrender them as often as necessary.
- 4) So far as able, make amends to those you have harmed. Resentment and guilt are soul cancers; amendment leaves no room for them.
- 5) It takes years of practice to undo years of spiritual negativity. The way to do it is to do it, a way of life, a continuous action of mind and heart.
- 6) Be thankful: gratitude is the antidote for fear, despair, lethargy, all spiritual illness. Gratitude speeds us along the path of conversion.
- 7) Receive God's truth. Recall the entire Psalm verse: *For behold, you look for truth deep within me, and will make me understand wisdom secretly*. Through surrender, become empty and humble enough to receive God's wisdom. You will know as experience and truth that God's mercy and healing are stronger than your sins. You will know that you are loved.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, for ever and ever. Amen.