3.6

THE BATTLE FOR YOUR MIND



Optional *Lectio Divina* Prayer

1. Read Proverbs 2:1–5.
2. Meditate on the words.
3. Speak to Christ about this passage.
4. Rest and listen in God's presence.
5. Discuss together.

Notes

A conversation between Jesus and Pontius Pilate on Good Friday reveals two different ways of looking at reality.

Jesus of Nazareth says he comes to bear witness to the truth (Jn 18:37). Pilate sarcastically responds, "What is truth?" (Jn 18:38).

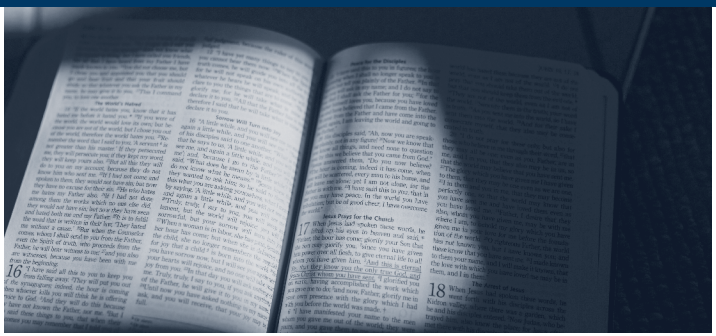
The idea of truth — a truth that applies to everyone, a truth that points to what is right and wrong and illuminates the path to human happiness — was not something Pilate cared about. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and that the real reason the Jewish authorities were accusing him was because they were envious (Mt 27:18).

But the truth of Jesus' innocence didn't matter. Pilate had "his own truth": He wanted to save his career. The Jewish leaders were threatening him, saying, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend" (Jn 19:12). Pilate feared a riot would break out, and he had to protect his reputation before Caesar's authority. So, to advance his own interests, he appeased the crowds and sent an innocent man away to be crucified.

Without truth as a compass, we make our choices based on fears, passions, emotions, and whims. We do whatever we want without asking the question of truth — without asking whether what we want is good or whether it will lead us to lasting happiness and to becoming the kind of person we want to be.

Pilate's "What is truth?" philosophy of life may be attractive to some in our modern world, but we must remember that truth is not an abstract idea. Truth is a Person, Jesus Christ: "In Jesus Christ, the whole of God's truth has been made manifest" (CCC 2466). After all, Jesus is not merely one of the world's many moral teachers; he is God become man. He doesn't simply show us a way *to* God; he *is* the way. And he doesn't just reveal truth *about* God; he *is* the truth. He came into the world to bear witness to the truth so that we might know how to be happy in this life and live with him forever in heaven: "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18:37).

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So here's the crucial question every Christian must face: Will we truly follow Jesus as "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6) and allow his teachings to shape our lives — or will we follow in the footsteps of Pilate, who preferred to make up his own "truth"?

DISCUSS

Have you ever encountered Pilate's "What is truth?" philosophy? How does it show up in our modern culture today? What does it mean to say that Jesus is the truth, and what implications does this have for us as disciples?

DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD

If Jesus is the truth, it changes the way we view the popular opinions and philosophies we encounter in our world. Like the early Christians who lived in a pagan world that always competed for their attention, we too face a constant battle for how we look at reality: what love is, what makes us happy, where we come from, where we're going, what life is all about.

Today's relativistic culture likes to portray itself as neutral, open-minded toward all viewpoints, promoting tolerance and acceptance. But the idea that "what's good for you is good for you, and what's

good for me is good for me" is, in fact, *not* a neutral value. It is a specific way of looking at the world that rejects objective truth and opposes Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life — and it is being ceaselessly promoted in today's world.

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I am the way, the truth and the life.

— John 14:6

Before becoming pope, Cardinal Ratzinger said,

> Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be "tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine," seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.[1]

So how are we as Christians called to respond? Must we give in to these worldly pressures? Consider the crucial advice St. Paul gave to the Christians living in pagan Rome: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

Just like these early Christians in Rome, we must resist being "conformed to this world." Much of what we absorb from our secular culture — about love, success, beauty, happiness, what is right and wrong — not only excludes the light of faith but often undermines what Jesus reveals about these important matters. If we're not careful, we might find ourselves trusting in the "wisdom" of the world more than the truth Jesus revealed: "It's not hurting anyone." "Everyone does it." "It's okay if we truly love each other." "That's not right for me personally." "It's just a movie."

As disciples, we are called to live in the truth. Instead of giving in to the various philosophies of our day, instead of allowing the world to tell us what to think, instead of "going with the flow" of popular opinion, Jesus invites us to "renew our minds." And this is not simply an academic matter; it has profound implications for our lives. What

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we believe about life — who we are, what we are made for, what love is, how to be happy — molds us and shapes us. Living in the truth makes us happy and fulfilled. Indeed, the truth sets us free (Jn 8:32).

DISCUSS

How have you been tempted to buy into the world's ideas about love, success, beauty, happiness or right and wrong? How can you battle against being "conformed to this world"?

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

— Romans 12:2

RENEWING OUR MINDS

Considering the dangers we face in being conformed to this world, how can we take St. Paul's advice and "be transformed by the renewal of [our] minds"? Many ways are available to us. Let's look at three that are the most foundational for any disciple of Jesus.

- ***Scripture***

  First, a disciple renews his mind through regular reading of Scripture. The Bible is no ordinary book: It's inspired by God. It is God's Word in the language of men. Those divine words written thousands of years ago reach across the centuries to continue to touch people's hearts and minds today. When we read the Bible, we aren't reading an old, irrelevant text; we are encountering God speaking to us — personally, in this moment. Consider what the Church, Scripture, and the saints teach about the power of the Bible in our lives:

  > "For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them."[2]

  > "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division

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> of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Heb 4:12)
>
> "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." (St. Jerome)

Reading Scripture every day is a vital way to form yourself in the mind of Christ.

Church Teaching

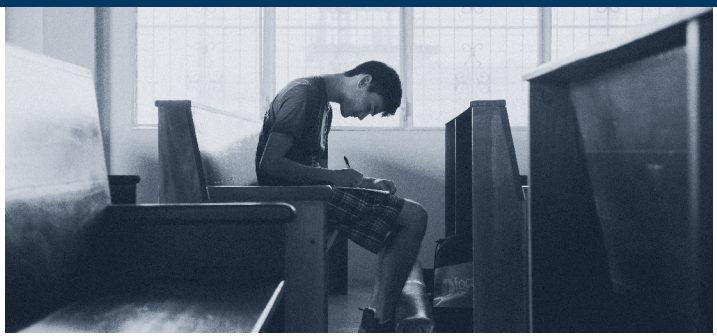
Second, a disciple renews his mind by encountering what Jesus teaches through the Catholic Church. As the God who became man, Jesus Christ is the fullness of God's revelation; he entrusted this revelation to his closest friends, the apostles, who in turn entrusted it to their successors (the bishops) throughout the ages, so that all nations and all generations could know the truth and path to happiness (Mt 16:18–19; 18:18; 28:18–20).

What a tremendous gift Jesus has left us! And yet, do we take time to learn what Jesus is teaching us through the Catholic Church? A disciple makes formation in the Catholic Faith a priority. There are many good programs, retreats, books, and resources about the Catholic Faith. But one basic place to start is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the official modern-day summary of what the apostles have passed on to us today. When we read the *Catechism*, we can be sure we are encountering the truth God has handed on through the Church.

What We Consume

Third, we must be careful about what we put into our minds: what we watch on screens, what we listen to, what we read, and what we look at. We are made in such a way that what we put into our minds changes us. It shapes how we look at reality and perceive what is good. It influences our desires and what we want to pursue in life. It's important for us to ask

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> ourselves: Does the media I take in reflect what is true, good, and beautiful? Or do I watch shows that fill my mind with a vision of life, beauty, love, and sexuality that is contrary to what Jesus teaches about these matters?

Being transformed by the renewal of our minds often means taking a hard look at what we take in and seriously asking ourselves whether it strengthens or hinders our view of reality. But it also means finding time to fill our minds with good things like the Bible and the *Catechism*. There are also many good and faithful Catholic books, resources, and devotional texts. By regularly taking in good Catholic content, our minds can slowly be conformed to the mind of Christ. That's why St. Paul exhorts us, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4:8). Imagine how differently we would think and live if we put away some of the music, media, and shows that constantly affect our thoughts, desires and emotions and replaced those with images and words that elevated our minds to consider the things of God.

DISCUSS

Based on the recommendations in this section, what content do you need to make more a part of your life to form your mind well? What might you need to limit or get rid of?

TAKE ACTION

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First, take a little time for reflection:

- How has worldly thinking creeped into my life?
- Am I thinking with the mind of Christ?
- Do I know what Christ teaches, and why?
- Am I being shaped by things that are true, good, and beautiful?
- Am I consuming media that is leading me to think rightly about God, myself, and the world?
- Which teachings of the Church do I struggle to understand?

Next, plan on what steps you will take to form yourself in the truth of Jesus Christ:

- How can I incorporate Scripture and the teachings of the Church into my life?
- Which books will I begin reading?
- What shows or entertainment will I stop watching or listening to?

As you make these changes, remember to start small. You likely won't be successful if you try to commit yourself to reading 500 pages a day and listening to 20 Catholic podcasts. Instead, pick a couple key practices to add to your week and try to make those practices a habit.

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KEY CONCEPTS

Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

What we put into our minds changes us. It becomes a part of us, shaping how we look at reality and what we perceive as good and influencing our desires. This is why we want to make it a priority to form our minds with the Faith.

John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth and the life."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Who Am I to Judge?: Responding to Relativism with Logic and Love by Dr. Edward Sri

Bible Basics for Catholics: A New Picture of Salvation History by John Bergsma

The Real Story by Edward Sri and Curtis Martin

Theology for Beginners by Frank Sheed

SLS20 Talk on focusequip.org: "Day 4 Keynote: The Teaching of the Apostles" by Dr. Jonathon Reyes

Notes

[1] Joseph Ratzinger, "Mass 'Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice,' Homily of His Eminence Card. Joseph Ratzinger, Dean of the College of Cardinals," accessed February 25, 2020, Vatican.va.

[2] Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, accessed February 25, 2020, Vatican.va, 21.