

# LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



## A Column by Fr. Tom

### The Truth Will Set You Free

Last week, we discussed the Seventh Commandment, “You shall not steal.” This week, the Eighth Commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,” can be considered a related Commandment, because when we give “false witness” against, or to, a neighbor, we have deprived them of something they deserve – the truth.

The Eighth Commandment in both the original text from Exodus and from the restatement of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy is basically the same as above. A strict interpretation of this Commandment might lead someone to believe that it is only a prohibition against falsity in court proceedings. However, in the book of Leviticus, where the Lord speaks to Moses of how the Israelite community should be holy as God is holy, God not only links stealing and false witness together, but He also expands the definition to include any deception of another. “You shall not steal. You shall not deceive or speak falsely to one another. You shall not swear falsely by my name, thus profaning the name of your God. I am the LORD.” [LV 19:11-12] From this Scripture passage, the Church follows suit and includes any deceptive speech as an offense against the Eighth Commandment. According to the *Catechism*, “The eighth commandment forbids misrepresenting the truth in our relations with others. This moral prescription flows from the vocation of the holy people to bear witness to their God who is the truth and wills the truth. Offenses against the truth express by word or deed a refusal to commit oneself to moral uprightness: they are fundamental infidelities to God and, in this sense, they undermine the foundations of the covenant.” [CCC 2464]

In the Gospel, Jesus continues this Commandment for truth by first proclaiming Himself as the Truth during the Last Supper. [JN 14:6] Just a few hours

later, during His interrogation before Pilate, Jesus as the Truth comes up again. “So Pilate said to him, ‘Then you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’ Pilate said to him, ‘What is truth?’” [JN 18:37-38a] From this passage, we realize that we are also called to live in the truth.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus again calls us to speak and live in truth. “Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, ‘Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all [...]. Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more is from the evil one.” [MT 5:33-34a, 37]

As we can see from these Scripture passages, God takes the truth very seriously. However, we are often very casual about the truth of our speech. According to the *Catechism*, offenses against the Eighth Commandment include false witness and perjury, of course. However, lying (even “white lies”), rash judgement, harming the character of another through false speech or gossip, as well as boasting and bragging, would all be included as offenses against the Eighth Commandment. There is one caveat to telling the truth, which occurs in keeping confidences between persons. We are all called not to divulge that which we have agreed to keep confidential, as it may harm the other. In addition, anything that a penitent discusses during sacramental Reconciliation is held in the strictest of confidence, and cannot ever be divulged. [cf. CCC 2488-2492]

We grow in holiness by loving our neighbor enough to be truthful with them and about them, thus giving them what they rightfully deserve.

