

COWARDS IN AUTHORITY

By Dr. Mike Scherschlight

PART ONE:

Pontius Pilate will stand for ever as the model of a coward – someone who clearly knew that what he was being pressured to do was wrong – cruelly and hatefully wrong – but who did it anyway because he was afraid of what would happen if he didn't. He said clearly that he found no case against Jesus, but he ordered Him to be whipped within an inch of his life and then He ordered Jesus to be nailed to a cross until he died of asphyxiation. Pilate was the governor; his job was to preserve law and order, to keep justice. He tried to wash that responsibility off his hands, right there, in front of everyone. But no leader can wash his hands of his responsibility before God and his fellow man. No man can escape the responsibilities of justice.

PART TWO :

So the question is, what made Pilate such a coward? Pilate did what all cowards did – he pretended that he didn't know what truth was. When Jesus said "All who listen to the truth hear my voice," all Pilate could say was, "Truth? What is that?" The path to cowardice, and the cruel injustice that results from it, always takes the form of agnosticism, of not knowing or caring about the truth.

PART THREE

CS Lewis once wrote that we are building a race of cowards, of "men without chests" as he put it, "These are people who aren't willing to pursue the ultimate truth of the universe, of God, of human nature, of morality. People who are just interested in getting by, in being practical, in getting a job and keeping it." That was Pilate. And Pilate was the one who gave the order to scourge and crucify the Son of God and the Savior of the World. Unless you are willing to pursue the truth, you will be a coward, and you will hurt the innocent you are obliged to protect.

PART FOUR

Social Justice can never survive without conviction, without a public commitment to the truth. We still see today how leaders hide their cowardly injustice behind the excuse of not knowing what truth is. For instance, when a recent U.S. President was asked when life begins, he said the answer to that question was “above his pay-grade.” In other words, he said truth wasn’t his responsibility – and he used that cowardly excuse to justify his policies by which innocent children are cut to pieces. Some people think democracy requires a kind of relativism... but, it’s not true. If democracy isn’t based on a clear commitment to the truth, it always degenerates into mob rule – just like it did with Pilate and the crowd. And they judged wrongly. Mob rule never leads to the common good.... it never leads to justice... what it leads to is the death of the innocent.

PART FIVE

Let’s not wash our own hands of responsibility. God has put each of us in authority. We each have an obligation to promote what is right, and not what is easiest or most popular. That holds true in our families, our jobs, in the voting booths. It means we must be committed to the truth. It means we need to make the effort to know the truth and be willing to defend it. We have to understand the truth in *principle*. The truth about Jesus, about God and the world, about the dignity of every human person, and about right and wrong. We also have to understand the truth in *practice* and be ruthlessly honest in examining ourselves and the situation. How do we do that?

- We do that by humbly taking counsel from others,
- by being committed to do what’s right – no matter how difficult,
- by understanding the teaching of the Church through the catechism,
- We do it by having courage to do what is right,
- and finally, we do it through prayer. *Jesus- make us men and women with chests. Give us courageous hearts.*