

## 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday (C)

- Our contemporary society seems to be permeated with deceit, dishonesty, liberal gossip, lying & the newly named phenomenon of 'fake news'.
- We are so surrounded by it & immersed in it that we tend to accept it unquestioningly as the normal way of life, as the way things are.
- "Everybody does it"; "business is business"; "that's just the way politicians are"; "advertising isn't supposed to be true" & so on; "you just have to take into account that people lie to get what they want".
- We've even now developed a rather innocuous word for this ugly reality of wholesale lying & purposeful deception & call it "disinformation".
- Disinformation is part & parcel of the propaganda of a certain group & is false information spread deliberately to deceive.
- It is sometimes confused with misinformation, which is false information but is not deliberate.
- Russia began to officially use it with the creation of a "special disinformation office" in 1923 & defined it as "false information with the intention to deceive public opinion".
- The food companies have fought for years against true food labeling; the tobacco industry for years maintained that nicotine is not addictive & that smoking does not cause health problems.
- The Washington Post, according to fact-checkers, reported that President Trump told 7,645 lies during his first 710 days in office - & these were only public statements.
- Some years ago I watched a documentary entitled "All Governments Lie" – something we all know & are powerless to change.
- Throughout the pandemic people have been purposely spreading false information through social media with the aim of destabilizing society, & have done so very successfully, & then recipients have further sent on these claims in the genuine belief that the information is true & correct.
- Truth, honesty & integrity are certainly not a priority in public life – social, political, economic & judicial.
- The more prevalent it is, the more it influences more & more people to deceive & lie for their own ends.
- Words – written & spoken – have become cheap & those who speak or write them lose credibility.
- So, trust, the essential characteristic of genuine personal relationships & the ultimate foundation of true community – this trust slowly erodes & dies.
- The fundamental Christian value of the common good is no longer of primary importance.

- Each one becomes an individualist, out for one's self, or for one's own exclusive group or race or nation, seeking one's own profit or advantage no matter what the cost may be to others.
- To a large measure, this has become a picture of our contemporary society - & we've come to just accept it, believing there is nothing we can do to change it.
- The word Jesus uses to describe this behaviour in his own time is the innocuous word used by the Greeks for 'actor' – hypocrite – where one's behavior and words are not the truth of who the person is.
- Today's Scripture says that one's speech declares the bent of one's mind; it is in speaking that one is tested.
- Goodness is produced from goodness in the heart; evil is produced from evil in the heart - each one speaks from the heart's abundance.
- In saying this, our readings tell us that we, as Christians, cannot be complacent with what can only be described as social sin; this widespread twisting of truth in our society for one's own advantage or for the profit of a given group at the cost of disadvantaging others, or for the purposeful destabilizing of society & the creation of polarization within nations, groups & even families.
- There is no room on our part for blind blissful ignorance, for passively accepting any propaganda or ideology, no matter what its source, that is deceptive.
- The readings tell us that we must be different, that we must say only what we sincerely believe; that we must be witnesses to the truth in every level of life.
- Scripture tells us that we can't just automatically & submissively agree with any declarations or dictates or doctrines simply on the grounds that they have been spoken by someone who claims authority, but that we should be critical, questioning & searching for what is the truth.
- Truth, honesty & integrity in speech & in action are absolutely necessary for us as Christians.
- Why? Because as Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth & the life", & because as Paul says, "it is we who bring to the world that word of truth & life".
- Truth-telling & living by truth is indeed our task & responsibility because it is part of the Christian imperative to love God, the author of truth, & to love one's brother & sister as oneself.
- What value do you place on your written & spoken words?