



## **Night of Vigil 2022 - « *Discerning the truth; finding the path* » (Jn 14,6)**

Since lies are the foundation of evil [The serpent deceived me and I ate (Gen 3:13)], the truth has always been abused in human history and our era is no exception. Baffled by the crises and shifts in the world, an increasing number of people are clinging to simplistic views that are based on conspiracy theories and fake news conveyed by social networks and fuelling a neo-populism characterised by hyperindividualism. Full of resentment and anger, these ideas incite hatred and violence against the authorities or the other person. These can lead to human rights abuse in the form of harassment, cruel, inhuman or demeaning treatment, and even torture. ACAT is therefore concerned by this unleashing of lies, and has denounced Call to Vigilance.

Truth is often difficult to define. The progress of the human mind leads to certain positions and theories, of which only a fraction will be recognised as true by experience; another part, initially recognised as true, will be found to be erroneous at another stage of development. Truth needs time to be confirmed. In the immediacy of an action, how can we discern truth from falsehood? This is the situation of Pilate at the trial of Jesus, and probably throughout his career: "What is truth? (Jn 18:38). Pilate is well aware that the political game is full of conflicting truths, and so he comes to doubt the very existence of truth. However, Jesus has just affirmed to him that the truth exists: "My kingdom is not of this world. [...]. I was born and came into the world to bear witness to the truth. Whoever is of the truth hears my voice" (Jn 18:36-37). Jesus presents himself as a witness to the truth, even to the point of martyrdom. But he declines to answer Pilate's question.

A few days earlier, after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus is talking to his disciples about his upcoming departure and Thomas asks, "Lord, we don't even know where you are going; how can we know the way? Jesus answers: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one goes to the Father except through me. If you knew me, you would know my Father too. From now on you know him and have seen him. (Jn 14:5-7).

Christ identifies the way and the truth and the life with his person. He is the way of truth to life in God. This path is found by following Christ, by walking behind him. This is what his disciples did. But is it that simple? Let us remember Peter when Jesus announces that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer much and be killed: "Peter, taking him aside, began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid, Lord! No, this will not happen to you!'" But he turned and said to Peter, "Get back! Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, because your thoughts are not those of God, but of men! (Mt 16:22-23). Peter is called Satan, the devil who is described elsewhere by Jesus as "a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44). Shortly before, for having proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, he had been called a stone on which a Church stronger than the powers of evil and death will be built, and promised the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Does Peter's blunder not also apply to the

entire history of Christians, including today? How can we discern the ideas of God from the ideas of men when we have undertaken, like Peter, to follow Christ?

Commenting on how we had failed to expose criminal abuses committed by clerics and laity in the Catholic Church for decades, the Dominican friar Gilles Berceville wrote: "I think that we do not promote enough the autonomy of people. We do not sufficiently train people to be morally discerning. This discernment must be exercised on the basis of concern for other people and unconditional respect for them. If people are not accustomed to questioning their conscience, and if their conscience is not trained to place respect for others above all else, they run the risk of becoming indifferent to what is truly evil, and of feeling no remorse. (La Croix, 8/11/2021, p. 22).

History shows that religion, including Christianity, is often unable to prevent terrible conflicts between truths that have been elevated to the rank of absolutes. And when this absolute is God, His defenders, intoxicated with excessive pride, become embroiled in battles that are very difficult to put an end to. Christ does not ask this, but to accept the truth that he embodies. To follow the Way of Truth towards Life in God requires not the pride of God-fanatics but humility, excluding hypocrisy and pretence: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. And what advantage will a man have in gaining the whole world, if he pays for it with his life? Or what shall a man give that is worth his life? For the Son of Man is coming with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will render to each one according to his conduct" (Mt 16:24-27; see also Lk 9:23-26).

As Christians and as ACAT members we find ourselves working at the core of conflicts of various forms and intensity, where the fundamental and even vital rights of men, women and children are denied. ACAT strives for justice. It reveals and analyses the truths at stake, those of the victims and those of the perpetrators of human rights abuses. On the basis of international treaties, it confronts those accountable with their hypocrisy, attempts to change their view of the victims by reminding them of the justness or rightness of their cause, reminds them that torture is an absolutely unacceptable practice and never an instrument of justice, and that punishment by death constitutes a crime. To not leave crimes against humanity, war crimes, torture and ill-treatment unpunished is to confront those responsible with the truth of their ignominy and to open up a possible path to redemption. To restore the victims' rights in truth and to compensate them is to enable them and possibly their families to regain a rightful perception of their own dignity. To raise the awareness of Christians to turn their gaze towards the victims is to remind them that people in distress are found on Jesus' path and that he identified with them: "Truly I say to you, if you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me" (Mt 25:45).

In the prayer life inherent in ACAT, the Night of the Vigil is a special moment to entrust to the Lord the victims, the torturers, those who feel concerned by the drama of torture and massacres as well as those who are indifferent to it, and to ask that the Spirit of truth may lead each person on his or her own path of life for the advent of a more just and more human humanity.