

## **Gaining the Christian Mind – Addressing the Intellectual Wounds of our Time**

Father Mike Keating, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012

I entitled this presentation “Gaining the Christian Mind – Addressing the Intellectual Wounds of our Time”. So first what I want to do is give a bit of an introduction why am I introducing this particular topic and then I’m going to look at six (what I am calling them “Intellectual Wounds of Our Time”) and I’ll speak a little bit about each one. Any one of these might be worth, well a lot more than we are going to be giving it, so this is just something of a road map, something to wave at, some of these issues.

This comes from my conviction that in every age there are particular ways that truth is assaulted. G. K. Chesterton once said that the Catholic Church is always defending at the moment what the world is stupidly attacking. *And at times* it is defending different things at different times. And my conviction is that the primary wounds of our time are intellectual wounds – the wounds of the mind. And so what I want to do is pursue that topic with you.

Begin with this quotation from Frank Sheed. Frank Sheed was a well-known lay theologian and author of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He once wrote this. He said “now most of us have Catholic wills, but not many of us have Catholic intellects. When we look at the universe, we see pretty well what other people see, plus certain extra features taught us by our religion. For the most part the same influences that form other people’s minds form ours. The same habits of thought, inclinations, bodily sense, indolences, worked upon by the same newspaper, periodicals, best sellers, films, radio programs, so that we have not so much Catholic minds, as worldly minds with Catholic patches. Intellectually we wear our Catholicism like a badge on a lapel of the same kind of suit that everyone else is wearing. Now he wrote this about 50 years ago but I think it’s still the case. That is, that it is often the case that serious-minded Catholics have Catholic wills, that is that we are trying to do the right thing, and we’ve got pieces of the world that are very Catholic, but in terms of an overall integrated way of seeing the world, we often have not found a way into a genuinely Catholic mind. And I think this is one of the great tasks of our time.

So by way of introduction we might just note that in every age the highest part of us, of course, is our mind. The Lord addresses himself to the mind. We are in the image of God because we have a mind and a will. And so in every age there is a wound here. The race has been wounded by the fall in mind. Our intellects have been wounded. And the healing of our intellect is the giving of faith. Faith heals our intellect and so we see by faith what we otherwise cannot see because we’ve got a kind of blindness. So this has been true in every age. Every age has a certain intellectual wound, and the Church is taught in every age. But in our age there’s a particular kind of intellectual wound that is unique. It’s new to human life, a human society, and so we want to pay attention to it. And simply put, it would be something like this that every human society that’s ever been has understood itself in relation to the divine. That is, humans have understood they need somehow to make sense of their life in light of God or the gods as best as they could and so human life would go forward in some sort of context in which we were dealing with the divine. There was a certain humility in this, a certain recognition that we were not the creators of the universe that we needed to find our way in it, we needed to find our place

in it. This is true of the ancient Chinese, the Romans, the Greeks, the Mesoamerican civilizations wherever. Of course it was true of our own civilization for many centuries. But it's been left to modern Western society (our time) to suggest that we need not consult the divine in order to understand ourselves. That we can construct a world, we can understand human life and society simply by applying our own brains to it. We'll figure it out. The world is a problem to be solved and we've got the stuff to solve it. So we can just leave all of that divinity behind. We need not consult the order of creation, we need not consult the divine; we will figure it out.

I would like to suggest that this development, how this happened is another conference sometime, it's a significant thing. The development is what we usually call by the name of 'the Enlightenment -- a kind of irony. It's better called the 'endarkenment.' It is a process by which our civilization grew proud. I'd like to suggest that just as a kind of morality tale, there's a little parable in the book of Ezekiel. Let me just read a piece of it because I think it pertains to how we got where we are. This is Ezekiel chapter 16. *Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem. As for your birth on the day you were born, your navel string was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you nor rubbed with salt nor swathed with bands. No, I pitied you to do any of these things out of compassion for you. But you were cast out in the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born. And when I passed by you and saw you weltering in your blood, I said 'live and grow up like a plant of the field'. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full maidenhood, your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. I passed by and looked again and behold you were at the age for love; and I spread my skirt over you, covered your nakedness, plighted my troth to you and entered a covenant with you, says the Lord. I clothed you with embroidered cloth, I swathed you in fine linen, I decked you with ornaments. You grew exceedingly beautiful and came to regal estate. Your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty for it was perfect through the splendor which I had bestowed on you, says the Lord.*

*But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your renown. You took your garments and made gaily decked shrines. You took your fair jewels which I had given to you and made yourself images of men. You took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to me and you sacrificed them to be devoured. And in all your abominations and your harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth when you were naked and bare, weltering in your blood.* Now there's the Lord speaking to Israel.

Now if you were to go back to the year, say 1,000, you're from another planet in the solar system, and you were asked to take a look at the world and it's various civilizations, and places of human activity and predict. One of these civilizations is going to rise and put on an impressive development that is so magnificent that it is going to draw the whole rest of the world into its own history so that the whole of the history of the world will become the history of this people. Who do you think it's going to be? Someone might say 'I think it is going to be the Islamic civilization centered in Bagdad that is a glittering beautiful civilization.' Another person might say, 'look at this Time dynasty in China, it's very impressive.' Someone might look at what's going on in the Yucatan peninsula and the Myna; maybe something is going to envelop there or develop. Nobody would have said 'you know what is going on in Europe, like northern

Europe; it was a land that looked like savage peoples fighting each other, barely hanging on, not a very developed civilization at all. And yet it was founded, probably more so than any other civilization in history, founded upon the truths of the faith. And because of the excellency of the faith, it began to develop. And it exploded upon the world about 500 years later and then it came to over all the world. And the whole of the world now, we call it now 'globalization.' What it means is that everybody is having to deal with western civilization. We're not having to deal with China but they are having to deal with us.

Now how did we get there? We got there because the Lord was good to us because of the faith, because of the wisdom that came from the faith. A civilization grew up that was more impressive than anything that had been seen. And then we grew proud. The movement of enlightenment is the movement of pride. It's the movement in which this civilization said 'though we mounted up on the wings of God Himself, of Christ, we have no need of him any more, we will now construct our own world according to our own wisdom and have, therefore, rejected the basis upon which it was founded. And the fruit of pride is blindness.

We have the most impressive and the stupidest society that has, perhaps, ever existed in the history of the world. It's very impressive technically, it's very impressive in certain sophisticated forms of life that have grown up among us, but because of our unparalleled blindness, our unparalleled pride, throwing away the divine, we've settled into certain blindnesses that are really quite remarkable. And these are intellectual wounds because pride is an intellectual wound. The devil doesn't have passions; he doesn't have senses but he has a mind and a will and his pride. And this is where we sin most grievously, not sensually but in mind. So if we are going to address in ourselves and in the world around us, if we are going to address the wounds of our time, we will want to understand them, we will want to say 'What are these wounds?' Christ is the healer, He heals the wounds of any age he's in; there is healing power. He came to heal the sick. The world will say what is the nature of the wounds that we face.

So what I would like to do then is just to look at, what I call six intellectual wounds, which of course bear fruit in ways that don't seem immediately intellectual. But they have to do with a lack of clarity of sight, of vision, of understanding; a lack of a renewal of mind. And the solution is to have minds transformed and renewed.

So the first: Religion (faith) has become rather than truth and knowledge, rather than an account of what is, it's been viewed as a matter of feeling and opinion. It's like choosing a half rather than understanding the secret to the world. Now here's the truth of it -- we know the truth. Faith and reason are two modes of attaining to that which is real; they are two modes of knowledge. Faith gives us a certain kind of knowledge. Reason, rationality, investigation gives us a certain kind of knowledge and they are complimentary. They don't contradict each other and together they give us a sense of what is real. And they need each other. Faith without reason becomes irrational. It tends to become passionate, it tends to become violent and one sees this in various religions of the world. Reason without faith becomes irrational. It begins to try to

answer questions it can't; it doesn't know its own limits and it runs people right into inhumanity and irrationality and we see a lot of that too.

So the truth of it is the converted mind (the transformed mind) sees that faith and reason are both important because they give us reality, they give us truth. So what's the wound? The wound is the view that because faith is in a realm that one cannot prove scientifically or rationally simply by a proof, therefore it's not actually knowledge at all. It's not knowledge. It's a matter of feeling or opinion and, therefore, it's something that you have privately; it's something you carry around in your head. It's a matter of taste. Some people will say it's a matter of genes. Some people are religious by heredity. Some people just don't have a believing gene.

Now one of the fruits of this is that religious truth does not inform the common life. It's something that we carry around commonly but it doesn't inform the common life. This is a very new situation in the history of the world. Every human society before ours was founded on a religious vision of the world, on some kind of spiritual understanding because only a spiritual understanding could take into account all the data: what a human is, our own desires, our hopes, how human relationships actually work. We've relegated all of that to the private and so we have a world in which the common is determined not by any kind of religious truth but by some sort of claim that religious truth doesn't exist and we can just figure it out to a kind of secular understanding. This doesn't work, though, and as a result you get a kind of pseudo religious secularism because one needs a religious view to sustain common life. So one gets a kind of established religion of secularism but it's pretending not to be religious, it's not really religion because it doesn't appeal to that which is invisible and beyond us but it functions like a religion and it harms people. It leaves people despairing. It leaves people not knowing what to do, where to go.

We're living now in the midst of a remarkable phenomenon of civilization that is putting itself to death, not because of external enemies, not because of deceitive barbarians, not because of a Bubonic plague, it's putting itself to death because it doesn't have the will to live. It's lost because it's lost God, it's lost a sense of its own being and at the moment Europe is disappearing. In 100 years it's hard to know what's going to be there – visit now! An intellectual wound!

Second, implicated in this loss of faith is a loss of the understanding that morality, that what is right and wrong, is a matter of careful thought. Morality is a matter of careful thought. There is such a thing as moral reasoning. So if someone says 'I think that such and such is right to do' or 'I think such and such is wrong,' a good question is 'Why?', 'what's your reason for that?' And then you have something to say. 'Well, I think it is right because...', 'I think it is wrong because ...' and then you can argue about this and maybe arrive at further clarity. But it is an area of thought. Now we live in this very odd situation in which morality is understood to be a personal opinion. 'I think it is right to do this.' 'Why, what are your reasons?' 'Well, I don't have any reasons, that's just the way I think about it. It's my opinion, I have a right to my opinion, you know.' Yeah, we all have a right to be as stupid as he wants to be. But it would be a little bit like saying, you meet somebody who says 'I think there are 17 planets in the solar system'. 'Really? Why?' 'Hey, it's my opinion, I just think that way – 17 planets.' And you say 'no, you

need to have reasons for them.’ This is a matter of understanding something that is. We discover moral truth, we don’t make it up. And so we’ve got this notion that kicks around of moral pluralism, the idea that you can have people who think differently about right and wrong and live somehow in the same society. This is an impossibility; this is like having pluralism in traffic laws. ‘Everybody drive the way they want because we believe in freedom; so you like driving on the right and you like driving on the left, you like parking in the middle, you like going on green and you like going on red. Well, let’s just go for it, shall we.’ What happens – utter and absolute chaos. Nobody can drive. Moral life is, you could say, it’s the traffic laws of human behavior.

A human society is based upon a common moral vision and the whole human race has always more or less known what is right and wrong. There aren’t really very many different opinions about this. But we find ourselves with a profound intellectual wound; it’s actually quite silly. We find ourselves saying ‘we can have a society but everybody just figures out for themselves what they think is right and wrong.’ This is an intellectual wound. This is a lack of clear thinking. It’s a fruit of pride because you can see what’s behind it is ‘I desire to create the moral universe, I want to be God’. Rather than saying ‘God creates the moral universe and I discover it.’ No, I will be the one who creates it; I will be the originator of my moral world. Well, you know, we make good creatures, you and I, but we really don’t really make good deities, not until the Lord gets a hold of us and fills us with his Holy Spirit. And this is one of the intellectual wounds of our time.

Third. And this is one, by the way, that I think is very typical of serious-minded Catholics. The ones that I have just been talking about, I think, we see; we tend to be fairly clear that moral and religious truth is really truth. The third is a loss of the sacramental vision of the world, the loss of a sacramental vision. To say that one has a sacramental vision of the world, is to say we understand that the whole of the created order is a mysterious mingling of what is seen and what is unseen, and it’s mingled together. There’s a mysterious connection between what we can touch and taste and see and that which is within it, under it, behind it, which is an invisible world. An invisible world which is both larger, more significant, more beautiful, more momentous than the visible world and which eventually we will see in its entirety. So the sacramental vision, say, would look at another human being and say ‘I see this physical form in front of me but I understand that there is an invisible and immortal soul here, and the invisible soul is more important than the physical things I see. But I get to that invisible soul through the visible.’ So two people touch each other and it is one invisible, immortal soul touching another which is why it is meaningful to touch.

What Catholics know, a Catholic mind, a converted mind would see that the whole universe is sacramental in everything: the created order, the stars, the planets, food, our bodies; everything means something else. Everything is hiding and also revealing something behind it, an invisible world behind it. The heavens are telling of the glory of God. It’s often noted, for instance, that Catholics in rather large numbers don’t believe in the real presence. Have you seen these statistics? I don’t know what they are exactly, but a pretty remarkable percentage of Catholics don’t really believe that this bread and wine is the Body and Blood of Christ. And then the

response can sometimes be well, we need to teach that more. And so you teach, no, the bread and wine is the Body and Blood of Christ. But I don't think it's a failure of teaching so much. Most Catholics have heard it, they've heard this teaching. It's just not believable because they don't have a sacramental vision of the world. If your view of the world is not sacramental but it's materialistic, if your view of the world that everything is exactly what it looks like, and there's nothing behind it and within it, but then somebody says 'once a week on a Sunday morning for reasons we don't quite get bread and wine just become something else.' And you say 'that's a little bit like believing that the moon is made of green cheese.' It doesn't seem to fit in with a view of the world. But if we understand that what is going on at the Mass is only the most intensive expression of something that is shooting through the whole of reality - that everything is sacramental and this remarkable place of sacramentality is actually revealing the nature of the whole created order - well, it becomes then instead of it becoming just this odd place where something different happens, it becomes the key to understanding everything that happens and we see that this is the way we look at everything. That nothing that we see stops with itself but it's revealing something behind it that is greatly meaningful.

So what we will want to do in healing this wound is to help develop a sacramental vision. Just a few things to note about it before going on: One is that a sacramental vision of the world does not conflict with a scientific understanding. That is science does investigate material phenomenon. And the sacramental view acknowledges the existence of the material; it just insists that you can't stop that. So science doesn't conflict with this but this broadens out the vision of the world (the world of science). When the scientist says 'we're discussing the physical and the material, (and by the way, there is nothing else, this is not a scientific thing to say, this is a philosophical thing to say and an incorrect one) and then you say, no, there is something else. And the second thing I want to say about it is one of the problems with the materialistic view of the world is that it is dreadfully boring. It leaves people just horribly bored. All you are is just a few dancing molecules that just happen to be what you are now. It's just all an evolutionary process; you were just a bit of primeval slop. Well this is not a very interesting way to look at the world and so you just have to fill your mind with distraction – turn on the TV set, keep the music going. But if the world is sacramental, it is enchanted. It is enchanted. It means beautiful and unseen things. You might meet angels around the corner. The world becomes a place of mystery and kind of magical.

I remember G.K. Chesterton once saying "I can understand people who say 'I disagree with the Catholic view of the world' because they say it is too magnificent, it's too beautiful, it's too rich, it's too full; it's a beautiful thing but I just can't quite get my mind around it.' He said I understand that. Here's what I don't understand he said. I don't understand people who look at the Catholic view and say 'it's really quite closed minded.' He said here you have a little world made up of a few atoms and a few molecules; we have everything you have and we have this magnificent world that shoots off in every direction. And you're saying 'your world is open-minded and big and our world is closed and small'." I think you're the one living in the cell. And this is actually the modern mind. The modern mind finds itself in kind of an intellectual prison cell and it creates despair. It tends not to give excitement for life. This is a wound of our time. And the more we can gain a genuinely sacramental vision and learn how to express it in

our life together and learn how to witness to it, the more that we will find that this is deeply refreshing and healing to the modern wound of mind here, the modern materialistic disease that so oppresses the human soul.

Fourth. This is connected to the loss of a sacramental vision; is a loss of a sense of liturgy ritual as the ordering principle of the world. We moderns don't have a good sense of this. This is not even just Catholic, although the Catholic would understand our liturgy as the fulfillment of all of the hopes and aspirations of all the religions of the world. But every religion has some kind of sacred rite. And what's the point of the liturgy? It's to re-align the world to the heavenly music, to the music of the divine. It's this understanding that the world has fallen out of alignment. There's a cacophony going on, it's out of harmony. And as God comes to the world, he brings the world back into harmony; he brings it back into the music of heaven. Let your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. He does this in many ways. One of the main ways, you could say the seed crystal of how this happens is He has given us a liturgy. And it comes right from the hand of God. It was given to Moses on the mountain. It was given by Christ at the Last Supper. Nobody invented the Liturgy. Our morning and evening prayer, the Sacrifice of the Mass, this comes right from the hand of God. And He's done this because He's showing us something about the nature of Heaven. Worship me this way because this will bring you back into alignment with reality. It will teach you how to deal with one another. It will teach you how to deal with the material creation. It will teach you the right posture of dealing with me. It's a dose of reality to bring back into harmony a cacophonous world. This is why the Liturgy is called by the Church the source and the summit of our life. It's not just something we run off to. You know I've got to get my Mass in between my aerobics thing and then going to the mall and then get it in and tick it off the list. No, it's actually the ordering principle that's meant to order our time, our year, our money, our relationships with one another and our stance before God. What we learn in Liturgy shoots out to the rest of our life; this is why it is at the heart and center of life and at the center of any genuinely Catholic culture.

We've been living in a time when this understanding of Liturgy, not surprisingly because this is one of the modern wounds of mind, has been lost and Liturgy has been a place of personal creativity or maybe common creativity, but it's like here's what we do, it's just our way of doing something. Well, that's not necessarily bad in some context, it's not a bad thing to say 'here's something we're doing together and we've thought it up and it's our expression of whatever'. But it's not Liturgy. The essence of Liturgy is we are doing everything according to the pattern that God showed Moses on the mountain. We're doing it carefully that way because that is actually ordering us to Heaven. We don't mess with the Liturgy; the Liturgy is messing with us. The Liturgy is changing us. And so, this is one of the reasons why in our time our Holy Father is spending so much time on Liturgical matters. He's not just a liturgical guru, you know, who likes this kind of thing, a hobby. What he realizes is that the New Evangelization, which involves many things, will be founded upon Divine Liturgy because liturgy cult worship is the basis of culture, even linguistically. Cultist and culture are united. How do you have a Catholic culture, how do you have a Catholic way of living? It's founded upon the Liturgy and the forms of the Liturgy are shooting through the whole of life.

As Catholic Christians we want to regain this intellectual understanding, that is, the understanding of mind, to help with the healing of a world that is very cacophonous, you know that's just lost the rhythms of heaven in a quite remarkable way even to the point of losing a sense of what humanity is. We're fighting now just fundamental human battles (life, sexuality) things that we really should understand, but you get lost in terms of your relationship with God and even your humanity begins to escape you.

Fifth. Not surprisingly given the kinds of things I've said, in trying to then validate what is real, what is true, we need to have some sense of it, the modern mind tends to turn to subjective experience as the validation of truth. How do you know something is true? Well, I know that it's true because I feel that it is so, that somehow I've had some experience that has told me this is true and therefore it's true. There's nothing outside of me that can give me clarity about this. There's no God, we've chased him away. There's no divine music that can order my life, my mind, my body, my relationships, so it is all that which just emerges from within me. Which is why this comment (which can sound funny, you know) you'll say 'I think such and such is true' and someone might say 'well, that's your truth, but I have a different truth. Here's my truth.' From the standpoint of fact or reality, that makes no sense at all. If something's true, it's true for you, it's true for me, and it's true for friends. But if we're talking about subjective experience, it makes sense. 'I really love butter brickle ice cream!' 'Well, that's true for you, but I can't stand the stuff, that's not true for me.'

So if truth is simply subjective, then it makes sense to say 'I'm living my truth and you're living yours.' But where does this leave us. This leaves us imprisoned in the self; we have nowhere to go except the self. And so the imperial self (which is the real ruler of our time), the imperial self becomes the arbiter of all truth. Not only does this lead to evil but it leads to great despair. We need to be told who we are; we are creatures, we're not God. We need someone to be speaking our name to us, and if we say 'no, I'm just going to speak my own name to myself,' we end up with nothing, we end up with darkness, we end up with nihilism, we end up with nothingness and there we find a lot of the modern mind. So the transformed mind, the renewed mind, learns to look outside of self. And where do we look outside of self? We look to the Church of Jesus Christ which was founded in order to be the pillar and ground of truth. But the Church is that part of heaven on earth that is rightly ordering and arranging that which is and that which is real that we can count on. This is the rock upon which one can build a house. Something outside of me that helps to order what I am experiencing so I understand it rightly. Therefore, understanding the place of the Church is actually the healing of our minds, it heals our intellectual wound and it sets our minds free. It's a kind of a paradox. We submit to the Church of Jesus Christ in ways that is right to do and we find ourselves actually set free to think. We say 'I don't want to be trampled by what the Church teaches,' and we find ourselves unable to think. We find ourselves getting lost in a little cell of nihilistic thought.

Then finally, sixth. Now there's been a loss of unity of life which is based on the loss of an overall understanding, intellectual vision. Truth is one thing, reality is one thing. It all fits together. It's like one beautiful gem with lots of different facets. And you can look at one of the facets and examine it but you only examine it in so far as it's a piece of the whole. It's like



looking at another human being. Here's someone, here's a very lovely person, beautiful of body, lovely of character; you've gotten to know them, their whole personality. And then somebody says 'I really love the adrenal system here, this is just something special.' You say 'I think he has lost a vision or something here, this is not like an adrenal system; this is a human being.' You can study the gland if you want. You can have a little science of glandular study if you want, but if you're not constantly bringing it back to the whole, you don't see anything. And what's tended to happen is an intellectual problem, a problem of vision in our world is, we've become immensely good at knowing a little bit about something and we've lost a sense of the whole. And when you lose a sense of the whole, you don't even know the little bit that you know. The person who really does think that a human being is simply a circulatory system and knows a lot about a circulatory system actually doesn't even know really what a circulatory system is, just doesn't understand how it fits everything else.

The transformed mind perceives the world as a unity and everything, so to speak, in its right place. And all the various ways that knowledge comes to us fill out this picture. And so one escapes from the typical modern dilemma, you know the typical life of a given person – it's fragmented. I live one way over here, and I've got this corner of my life here, I've got a door here I go through and there's my entertainment, there's my work, there's my workout, there's my family life, here's my buddies from school, whatever, and I have this fragmented life. And sometimes I'm a different person in these different places; I'm not one human being. This is a typical experience of people. They often regret it, people mumble about it. It's an intellectual wound; it's a problem of conception. And the healing of that wound will be the gaining of a true Catholic vision that will integrate the whole of life individually and communally.

So good, one looks at these various wounds, and what is the point of identifying them? Here's what it's not: the point of identifying them is not to wring our hands and say 'oh, no!' because that is never what Christ is doing because Christ came to heal. We might say 'the world is not going very well' and that's true and, you know, ever since that fateful day in the garden the world has not been going very well. But Christ came to heal and save. And He came in our time; He gave us life at this time because he wanted us to have the grace and the gift to touch and to heal the wounds of our time. So we want to understand them so that we might see like a good doctor. A good doctor when he gets a patient, he kind of pokes and says 'how does this feel?' 'Okay that hurts; okay, stand up here, breathe' so we can see really what is afflicting our time. Let's really get to the bottom of it. Let's really understand the disease because the healing of the disease is in Jesus Christ and his Church. All of the medicine for the wounds of our time has been given to us; we've got work to do, but they've been given to us.

So as we think about making a difference for our world, as we think about continuing on to find ourselves conformed to the Lord, further converted, as we hope to gain ever more clarity of vision, let's set ourselves this task really to form in ourselves a Catholic vision of the world. Let's do our best to reject the wounds of our time, to not fall prey to them, to not be like that guy that Frank Sheed was talking about whose got a Catholic will but not a Catholic intellect. But let's do what we need to do to gain that vision as we do, we'll be a terrific light to those around us because there's tremendous thirst for heaven, for the harmonies of heaven, for health, for life

and those around us. And the Lord has given us what we need as we come to him humbly in faith to help Him as He heals the wounds of our time.

Questions:

Paco Gaverlides: When you mentioned the area of subjective truth, as people look at it as a validation of what is true, one of the things that was striking me is that the human being never the less is meant to experience reality as it is. And it seems to me that one thing that is helpful is to know what is appropriate for us to see so we can experience what is truly the good in reality and not think that's something that won't affect us subjectively. To be able to see that *the heavens are telling the glory of God* brings me to a place that I wouldn't be if I couldn't see it. Maybe you could elaborate on this.

Fr. Mike. Very good comment. The point is not that we are not supposed to experience. And how do we get at truth? There's a certain experience that we have of what is true or real. The question then becomes how do we understand what we are experiencing? Say, for instance, we have some experience of God, of the Divine. Well, you know how this goes. If you've ever had some experience of the presence of God with you, it doesn't tend to come in a catechism form. 'Hello, I am God, three persons in one God, proceeding Father, Son, and that is who I am. And here I'm touching you. I'm not touching you this way, I'm touching you.' We experience something – it's rather amorphous. We're in the presence of One who is beyond us. We then go to the church to order our experience. We say 'oh that's what I'm experiencing, and not this but this, I see.' We get a sense for how we are supposed to understand that which we are experiencing. Because personal experience is very real but it's not enough for understanding; we need to go outside of ourselves even to understand our own experience. So the point is not having some kind of head knowledge and no experience (we're supposed to be, in a certain way, drunk with the experience of reality), but we're understanding it according to something outside of us, namely the Church.

Question: This has actually been quite refreshing to hear. I have a question about a future reading and concepts that you spoke about today. I work for a Catholic institution that really is no longer a Catholic institution and there's a lot of conflictual environment because of that. As people who are not Catholic sometimes perceive that which is not being presented them as a form of Catholicism which is really not, it is just a personal opinion or a management way of man handling things, and there has actually even been some distortion of the truth where there have been some things said where the Sisters of Mercy were never really involved with faith. They were involved with works and charitable organizations and there wasn't really any real faith about it because that makes it more palatable to the environment that we live in. So what I'm wondering is, this is very true, how do I practice this in the environment that we currently live in and how do I have meaningful conversations with people who have no concept of this in a way where I can articulate that very clearly. So it's like I want to take what you've given us today and be able to start continuing to read it, study it, and implement it. Because one of the biggest problems I face on a daily basis is hearing appalling things that are so far from the truth that I'm not even sure how to integrate this is the truth.

Fr. Mike: As you can imagine, there is no simple answer to that question. This is the prudence of how do we live in the world and I would think that what might come as one continues on with the teaching that is going on here (you know, some of these customs can be flushed out). I think one thing that I would say, though, is this: Jesus at one point says 'you are the salt of the world'. And salt (it's an interesting figure because salt you don't have for its own sake simply), it's always on something else, either to preserve it or to give it flavor. But if salt loses its flavor, what's it good for? So one of the first tasks for us is to actually be salty. That is, we need to learn to be salty together. That is, we need to learn how these principles work at least amongst the people of God and then as we take this into a world that so desperately needs it, how we can get it into the world in a good way, how we can express it and so on (there will be a thousand different ways and we'll just need wisdom and so on), but the root of it is we are living it ourselves with our own people, so to speak. So I think a great task is how do we maintain our salt because if the Church continues to be salt, the world is in great shape. It's when the Church loses saltiness, then the world is in trouble cause now where is salvation going to come from.

Question: I fear this is about to be pretty much the same question. As you engage in the world about you, as you look around and see that people are coming from a very different frame of reference and, perhaps, a lack of inclination to change those first principles what's the best way to speak particularly when the responsibility may not be necessarily reordering those first principles?

Fr. Mike: You know, we are at a time of new evangelization, that's a term that gets used a lot. And one could ask what's new about it. The Church has been evangelizing for 2,000 years. Is it just like 'okay, around the track again, c'mon; this time let's go, now.' But the answer is 'no.' It's new in large part because it's the attempt to re-evangelize a society that use to be Christian and no longer is; that's new. It's one thing to come upon a pagan society that never heard of Christ and then to attempt to speak the word of the Lord. It's a very different thing, C. S. Lewis once said "the difference between trying to evangelize pagans (meaning pre-Christian pagans) and moderns is the difference between a man attempting to woo a young maiden and a man attempting to re-animate a relationship with a cynical divorcee." It's a lot harder. So one just wants to note this and say how do you speak to someone like that? Well, there's an art here. There's no simple technique; there's an art. How does one re-awaken a love that seems to have grown cold? How do you deal with people who think they know what Catholicism is and actually don't at all but they're convinced they do?

Well, you know, there are no two steps to it. These are the kind of things we want to become proficient in, we want to become artists in, to learn how to speak to such people, to learn how to penetrate such environments. It's a good thing to be thinking about, to be thoughtful of, to be trying various things. This is the task before us really.

Question: Ann Arbor is a place that I've heard referred to by some as the home of an evil spirit of the spirit of over intellectualization. I think what you've said is tremendously refreshing to my soul; it's a helpful reorientation for, I'm sure, many of us. (I want the tape.) But there is a

possibility in this atmosphere here that we try to think ourselves into deeper conversion, so I thought Paco's remark about experience was an interesting one because faith in the Church is both knowledge of, accepting of, and proclaiming the truth and it's also contemplative. It's receptive, it's experiential really with the Lord, and that's the nature of that part of the relationship. And I wonder if you could talk about how these things work together.

Fr. Mike: It's worth our making the distinction between that which is intellectual and that which is academic. Many academics are very diseased intellectually. We can think we're talking about things intellectual. In the Christian tradition what that means is we're talking about things that have to do with our minds. And children have to do with their minds. This isn't just people with advanced degrees, you know. The Lord is always addressing our minds because (this is true of contemplation; contemplation is the gaze upon Christ; it's an activity of mind, it's not an academic activity) so it's a good thing to know that when we talk about the intellectual wounds of the time, we're not mainly saying these things are going to be figured out by Ph.D.'s – that's what we mean by intellectual wounds. That, itself, is an intellectual wound of the time that we think the world is fixed by experts. But we do want to say we don't want to be anti-intellectual in the sense of pulling away from the addressing of the Lord to the mind because this is what he is always addressing. Most of our conversion is conversion of mind. But that means not just what I happen to be thinking about propositionally – this is a whole vision of the world. This is a whole way of seeing – it's the healing of sight. So we need to be transformed in mind but that doesn't necessarily mean we need to be reading high level books. It means that our minds need to be changed, our minds need to be shifted by the Holy Spirit. It's just worth noting that this is an operation of the Holy Spirit. We don't read ourselves into transformation of mind, simply this comes from the effect of the Holy Spirit who changes us. This is one of the main things he does when he brings us from darkness to light. He actually changes our minds, he shifts our minds – he transforms them.

Paco: Just to say I think, perhaps, that the word that we're grasping to find is attaining wisdom as the biblical sense of the word rather than just a knowledge of facts – wisdom as a way of God's understanding of relating to this situation.