

*Truth...*

*The Foundation for Feelings*

Written By Brother Eugene Trzeciecki



There is a message for us about the necessity of discovering the truth of a situation. There are degrees of insight ranging from intellectual to transformative. When we absorb the truth of a powerful dream of insight, it changes us and makes it impossible for us to continue as is, which is why we often resist and deny what know to be true. For example, almost everyone can recall warding off the truth about a significant relationship or about the inner necessity to make a change until the truth was unavoidable. We do this because truth often means that we will be leaving our familiar world or will be cast out of it. Thus we ward off acknowledging that something is meaningless, that love is gone, or that abuse is taking place, often as long as we can.

Love and passion for someone or something, a calling that feels like destiny, the positive insights of truth with us, may also be resisted because it will put us in conflict with others' expectations of our own loyalties, because it will require that we sacrifice who we are now and how we are seen by others, or because we do not know what will happen to us or others if we alter our course. Consciousness as the awareness of truth brings choice with it. Even if we do nothing, once we see and feel the truth of a situation, we know that doing nothing is a choice and that silence is consent.

There are interior turning points in everyone's life. We think of these as **moments of truth**, moments when we now know something to be deeply true for us, the acceptance of which will change our life. It may be an inner revelation about what really matters to us, about who or what we love. It may be a moment of clarity in which we know that we are in a destructive or meaningless relationship and no longer can deceive ourselves about this situation. It can be a revelation about the nature of reality, or the reality of divinity, which causes a radical shift in our philosophical, religious, or even scientific perspective, after which we can never again perceive the world and our place in it as we once did. Or the moment of truth may shatter an illusion about someone else upon which we have built a life or an identity.

The truth we are confronted with can seem to be **out of the blue** and totally unexpected, though we may surmise later that it was something we must have known for a long time that finally broke through our denial or resistance. In a moment of truth, we may be presented with something so important that it can change our life and our personal world; literally, it can have life - or death consequences.

There is an ineffable something that accompanies moments of truth, in which feeling, knowledge, and action to be taken fall into place. The clarity of the moment stops time. There is an interior hush, a cessation of movement, an intaking, that precedes action. The moment of truth illuminates the totality of the situation and includes what now must be done. It is also an experience of wholeness, as information that we have avoided or facets of ourselves we have repressed, denied, or projected upon someone else now comes into consciousness.

What comes with moments of truth gives one an inner sense of certainty and clarity. In such an experience we know we matter and that there is meaning and purpose in life. It is an epiphany, a high point of coherence. While this is often subjectively and momentarily wonderful, following the bliss, which is another way to describe what happens, also requires sacrifice of the now outmoded life, and with the sacrifice usually comes suffering, for others as well as oneself depending upon the resistance and the price of making a change. To set our on a course of action,

knowing it is deeply right for you to do but not knowing what the cost will be to yourself and others, requires courage.

Moments of truth that change the world occur in individuals who, in expressing their personal truth, speak for an idea whose time has come and, in so doing, seem to tap collectively held feelings that can no longer be contained or ever put back again.

Thinking about people says something or does something that sets the course, not knowing what will happen next and often fearing the worst. It is not an act in which we are assured of the outcome: we do not know whether everything will turn out well or even that the sacrifice called for will make a difference, yet not to respond from the depth of the feeling we have about the rightness of that act would be to deny who we are at the soul level.

A common metaphor compares our actions as crucial moments to **stepping into the void**. Authentic behavior begins with acts of truth; it may take us metaphorically into the void, into the fire, or onto the cross, and for a time after we do not know what the outcome will be.

When we decide to do what is true, or speak up about it, our efforts may be greeted with hostility, denigration, and efforts to humiliate us; we may feel ourselves being crucified, abandoned by others and even by the certainty that got us there. Once we have declared ourselves, we are no longer able to resume our former position or role; we cannot go back to who we were. In some situations, once we take the position we have, as far as others are concerned, we are dead.

Moments of truth can be compelling when inner certainty and circumstances come together, when what you must do now is clear, and you find the courage or outrage that enables you to take that significant step. Until something happens that is **the last straw**, the truth of the situation is warded off, minimized, denied, rationalized away, and the status quo is maintained. Emotional pain that would inform us often does not break through into consciousness because it is buried under something else: addictions to substances or activities, depression, pervasive unfocused or misfocused anxieties, chronic pain, or chronic medical conditions. Common vernacular describes this as the result of having **stuffed** feelings, a way only to have them resurface disguised as a psychological or medical symptom.

We learn to stuff our feelings because they are unwelcome. In childhood, if we were made to feel ashamed when we expressed our feelings or if they provoked others upon whom we were dependent to withdraw from or punish us, we learn to do this. At the very least, if no one was interested in what we felt, we may have never learned to discriminate, name, and express our feelings. We thus remain emotionally undeveloped, “feeling illiterates”, unable to read our own emotional states or those of others. At the very worst, when terrifying rages or verbal, physical, or sexual abuse is unleashed upon children, by parents or caretakers upon who they depend for survival, not only feelings but, also often, memories are buried through selective amnesia, dissociation, and even multiple personalities.

Wherever power (rather than love or justice) is the ruling principle in any relationship, family, organization, or country, it is not a safe place to have feelings and speak the truth. Only when one reaches a sanctuary and gradually feels what freedom means can truth emerge. The

degree of oppression and punishment differs from relatively benign to rule by terror, but the psychology of the situation is the same: a police-state mentality results, in which there are numbing and denial of feelings, repression of memory for painful events, and loss of spontaneity, leading to depression and obsessive or addictive behaviors.

The child who lives in a dysfunctional family internalizes the rules, just as citizens of a police-state do. Thought control, suppression of feeling, and behavior inhibition are enforced after a while from within the person, under such circumstances it is safer not to know what you really feel toward those in power, whether parents or authorities, lest you inadvertently reveal it and be punished. What you feel about anything is either irrelevant or punishable when you are controlled by someone in power who needs you to reflect well on them.

Ideally, a safe place psychologically is within a relationship in which one can be in touch with his thoughts, feelings, and sensations without being punished, judged or abandoned for having them. It is a place where one can trust that he will not be lied to and will be free of exploitation, where the other does not feel superior at his expense, does not betray one's confidences or intrude upon his boundaries. Anything that takes advantage of one's vulnerability is exploitation. Sanctuary has a spiritual dimension, which comes about when those involved feel or know that there is something sacred in each of them, and is aware that there is a spiritual, soul-recognizing element present in the relationship. It is important to know what constitutes a sanctuary relationship and to also know that we do manage, sometimes quite well, in imperfect but good enough situations once trust is established.

When it is safe, and there is another person or people who care about what happened to a person in the past and what he is feeling now, repressed feelings can emerge and traumatic events be remembered. Even then, it is not easy. Many people from dysfunctional families cannot remember events and do not even know that they cannot remember until someone asks or others are volunteering information, and suddenly it dawns: They cannot remember.

Sometimes, a like situation brings back the repressed memory. An abusive situation in adulthood such as mugging or rape unleash nightmares and memories that go back to childhood events. Commonly, a woman who dutifully or against her wishes has intercourse, does so by "numbing out" and submitting, keeping both current feelings and past abuse out of consciousness. Then, when she falls in love and finds passion and tenderness in a sexual embrace, may find that this sexual awakening also awakens memories and with them bad dreams, torment, and conflict about her sexuality.

Sometimes, traumatic events can be remembered in the same way that facts are retained, but without emotion. This is the fate of children who are used and abused by narcissistic parents or caretakers and grow up unaware of their own feelings. They learn to dissociate themselves from feelings for their own sufferings and are contemptuous of the weak and without sympathy or empathy. They enjoy exercising power over others. When they are soldiers who are fearless in battle, they are called heroes. When they commit crimes, they are called psychopaths. Usually the lack of feeling and ability to inflict pain on others reflect the brutality within the dysfunctional family in which they were raised.

Power over others serves psychologically as a means of obtaining a sense of security by having more power than others. Psychologically, power over others is also sought in order to feel superior, a goal that compensates for underlying feelings of inferiority. Power over others is also exercised to ward off feeling little, insignificant, or weak and is responsible for the sadistic belittling behavior on the part of people with power.

The child is father to the man in the worst way when it comes to power; such a man grows up to become a tyrant, getting back for what was done to him. In his drive for power, he uses his children, making them, if he can, into extensions of his need for acquisition of power, prestige, and position in the world. In turn, unloved by him, his children work to please him, hoping that he might love them, or seek to be like him so as not to be insignificant as he makes them feel. Adult children from dysfunctional families can become related, power-seeking, angry men, whose adult achievements cover unhappy, unloved, scared, and angry inner children and whose choice of spouses and willingness to manipulate them into loveless marriages create the next generation of dysfunctional families.

In absence of love, as each generation ruled by power grows old, the insecurity of childhood returns with the dependency that age and infirmity bring. Sometimes, child abuse begets elder abuse in which the abuse goes around in one generation, as the child who was abused becomes the abusing adult to the aged parent who abused him. To break this or any cycle of abuse, compassion must enter, and with it an acknowledgement of the suffering that was endured by all concerned.

A child who is not cared for or cared about is abandoned.

Ambitious, narcissistic parents have children to further their own ambitions, enhance their image, reflect well on them, or carry on the family name. Children are abandoned emotionally when they are not loved for themselves, if their needs are unimportant, and it does not matter what they feel.

Children who are treated badly think of themselves as bad. They usually assume that they must deserve to be punished, either because they did something mischievous or because they are wicked. When children are picked on and called dirty or stupid or a slut, they usually decide that this must be so. Children take the blame. They spare their parents and caretakers and adopt toward themselves the attitudes of those adults who abused them. The child then suffers from the double abuse of being badly treated and assuming that it is deserved.

When children are abandoned emotionally, they grow up to be unhappy adults who ward off feeling of emptiness, abandonment, sadness, rage, impotency, shame, and other distressing feelings by drinking, smoking, eating, watching television, and behaving in all sorts of compulsive ways. Addictions, codependency, and depression keep one from feeling his emotions and recognizing his visceral sensations, which could inform one of the truth of his situation.

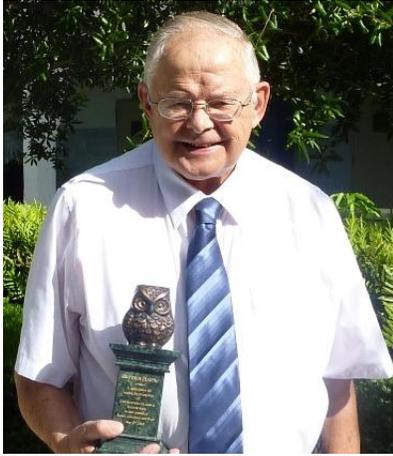
Only when one can feel his feeling and recognize why he has them can he know what gives his life meaning, what kind of work or what relationships matter to him personally. It is necessary to him to become conscious of his feelings before he can make authentic choices based on love of place, work, and persons, or for spontaneity and joy to be part of his life. In order for

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him to know what he feels, significant others have had to care about him and been concerned about how he feels. It has had to be or become safe for him to speak the truth and to act upon what he knows. once he can act upon what is true, his choices shape his life, and his life is an expression of what genuinely matters to him (provided, of course, that he have the freedom to choose and opportunities to choose from). Only then is that person free of power - and is free.

- A MIND MADE NOBLE LEADS A NOBLE LIFE -

## About Brother Eugene Trzecieski



Eighty-two year old Marist Brother and teacher, Br. Eugene Trzecieski, has worked at Christopher Columbus High School for the last 43 years. Br. Eugene became a Marist Brother at age 17, as soon as he graduated from high school. He started his teaching career in 1950 at New York's St. Ann's Academy and later taught at Archbishop Molloy High School, NY, and worked at the Marist Brothers Training House in Esopus, NY, as the Director of Novices. Over the years he has served Columbus as Academic Dean, Treasurer, Teacher of Latin, Philosophy, Humanities, and English. He was also a key leader in Columbus extra-curricular activities, moderating the National Honor Society for 25 years, creating the school's Student Activities Committee, and founding the Columbus Arts Society for Adults and the Erasmus Culture Club for students. For years he also was in charge of the gardening and landscaping of the school's campus, a job he loved

because of his great passion for nature.

Br. Eugene taught at Columbus from 1968 until 2010. Thousands of alumni from the last five decades remember him most for his famous 12th grade "Philosophy of Being" class, which he taught for 43 years straight. In fact, Br. Eugene holds the title of the teacher who taught at Columbus for the most number of years. Many alumni will also remember that Br. Eugene enlivened the campus with his beloved pet, Brandy, a St. Bernard that won the hearts of all the students and became the school's mascot.

Although he no longer teaches, Br. Eugene is still very actively engaged at Columbus, handling all of the school's paper copying and keeping the school archives, a collection that he started in 1968 and that today contains hundreds of bound books and files which he neatly organizes. It was Br. Eugene who came up with the idea to publish the school's first history book to commemorate the school's 50th Anniversary in 2008. He wrote the book entitled "50 Years Exploring Christopher Columbus High School" with co-author and fellow teacher, Mr. John Lynskey.

Around Columbus Br. Eugene is respected and loved by faculty, alumni, and students. He is known as a wise and gentle man who is demanding, kind, and inspiring. He always referred to his students as gentlemen, and never found the need to send a student to detention. Early in his career he came up with a quote that he began teaching to his students; "A mind made noble, leads a noble life." It has been his motto ever since.