

Landry: Our task is simple – stay close to Jesus, and learn the truth

If you've ever seen the movie *Captain America: Civil War*, you might recall that Captain America (Steve Rogers) is faced with a particularly difficult decision.

All of the Avengers have been asked to sign the "Sokovia Accords," disclosing their secret identities and special powers to the United Nations. The actions of the Avengers in previous movies have left a number of people uncomfortable, and the UN is being asked to register and regulate anyone who demonstrates the extraordinary abilities of a superhero.

Steve feels that the Avengers are the best ones equipped to decide how and where to use their abilities to respond to the various threats the world faces, and he doesn't trust the personal agendas of government officials.

His own experience of watching the rise of Nazi Germany has made him leery of any government that collects a list of those they didn't trust or like very much. His belief that the Avengers should not sign on to the accords puts him at odds with Tony Stark (Ironman) and several of the other Avengers, who feel that signing is the best way for them to operate and serve the world.

In the midst of a heated argument with Stark on this topic, Rogers learns of the death of his beloved Peggy Carter (his first love from the original *Captain America* movie). At the funeral, Sharon Carter presents a brief eulogy, during which she quotes her Aunt Peggy:

"Compromise where you can. Where you can't, don't. Even if everyone is telling you that something wrong is something right; even if the whole world is telling you to move, it is your duty to plant yourself like a tree, look them in the eye, and say 'No, you move.'"

These words define the position Steve Rogers settles on – leading to the climactic battle between Steve Rogers and Tony Stark, with a variety of Avengers choosing one side or the other. Steve is unwilling to compromise on the things he believes to be true, so he plants himself and tells those on the other side that it is they who ought to move.

There's a lesson in Steve's story for the rest of us that has close ties to a famous question in Scripture.

During Jesus' trial on Holy Thursday night, Jesus stands face to face with the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, debating whether or not Jesus is a king. When our Lord tells Pilate that He came into the world to "testify to the truth" (John 18:37), Pilate responds with a question our culture often wrestles with today: "What is truth?" (John 18:38).

If you were asked about the length of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, the answer would be 218 metres (including the porch). This is an objective, verifiable truth that happens posted online. If you were asked, however, what your favorite colour is, you could respond truthfully that it is red, or blue, or green ... and I could give a completely different answer that would also be true.

When it comes to our faith, Christianity holds that our understanding of God, our ongoing relationship with Him through the Church, and His expectations of us are not a question of subjective truth but rather an objective truth, which we believe God has revealed to us.

Truth, in this case, is like the dimensions of St. Peter's. It is not something we decide based on personal preferences, or even democratic process. As a result, like Steve Rogers, Christians can find themselves at odds with popular opinion when we cling to and explain what we believe to be true. And it is often a source of conflict in a culture that prides itself on an "anything goes" mentality, particularly as it concerns religion.

But this conflict isn't unique to the twenty-first century. In Jesus' time, like our own, the general population had no problem looking at Jesus as a nice guy, a teacher, or even a prophet, but accepting his word as truth often demanded more of them than they were willing to give.

Consider one of Jesus' most awe-inspiring miracles: the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-14). What follows this miracle is one of Jesus' most challenging teachings, the "Bread of Life" discourse (John 6:22-65). It is during this sermon that Jesus refers to Himself as "the Bread of Life", and tells the crowd "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). People were scandalized – was he asking them to be cannibals? – and we're told that "many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him" (John 6:66).

These disciples left in spite of all they had seen (including the miracle of the loaves), because what He asked of them was just too much to bear. Clinging to the truth can be hard, and can bring with it even more difficult consequences. Jesus tells us "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Believing in Jesus and clinging to the truth will unfortunately bring conflict, and at times (as was the case for Steve Rogers) this conflict may arise between ourselves and those we hold most dear.

Our task is simple: stay close to Jesus, and learn the truth. Earlier in John's Gospel, prior to Pontius Pilate's lingering question, Jesus gave us a very clear directive concerning the truth. He said: If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32).

– Mike Landry is the chaplain for Evergreen Catholic Schools. He is based in Spruce Grove, Alberta.