

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was sitting in the waiting room of a doctor's office watching the CBS morning news. Suddenly, a special report broke in and began showing the World Trade Center in flames.

Some of you may remember the events of early 1983 in Waco Texas. A group headed by a man named David Koresh, was held siege by the FBI and ATF. During a raid of their ranch, their Church building caught on fire and 76 members of the cult died.

For those of you who are my age or older, you may remember the name Jim Jones. In late 1978, 909 inhabitants of his compound called the People's Temple, died in an apparent mass suicide. You may recall that they drank grape Kool-Aid laced with cyanide and narcotics.

What do all of these events have in common? They are the results of false teachings and false prophets. In the September 11th attacks, members of an extreme branch of the Sunni Muslims became so convinced by their leader Osama bin Laden, of the need to propagate Islam and kill infidel Americans, that they were willing to hijack and crash planes into population centers and thereby become martyrs.

David Koresh's sect, known as the Branch Davidians, were an offshoot of the 7th Day Adventist Church. Koresh had convinced the cult members that he was the next Messiah. Part of the religion was that Koresh could take as many wives as he felt necessary. And he did just that, 15 of them, some of them being as young as 12 years old.

Jim Jones, the charismatic leader of the People's Temple church, taught a bizarre blend of Communism, free love, drug use along with the fact that he was the reincarnation of Jesus, Gandhi, Buddha and Vladimir Lenin among others. Many people have been misled throughout history because of false teachers and false prophets.

As a people of faith, it is our responsibility to seek out the truth and ensure that we are not lead astray.

Today's readings remind us that not everyone who teaches is a prophet, not everyone who teaches draws us to God. The first reading today, from the Prophet Jeremiah, tells us about shepherds who claim to be leading God's people and yet who scatter them. The prophet says that these false leaders put their own existence at peril when he writes "Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter my flock."

Why did I open this homily with example of false teachers and false prophets that are obviously and clearly off the beaten path? Surely we are not in danger of falling prey to these false prophets or teachers?

Or are we?

We live in a popular culture that says that I should be able to do anything, right?

*Everyone does it, it must be OK?*

Our secular society is the most dangerous false teacher around. Some of the errors that the Catholic population has absorbed from our popular culture include beliefs on contraception, sterilization, cohabitation, abortion, and euthanasia.

Although the Church teaches that contraception and sterilization are gravely sinful, it is estimated that nearly 75% of Catholic couples use artificial contraceptives or are sterilized, the same rate as the population as a whole. Interesting that every Christian denomination in the world saw contraception sinful for the first 1930 years of the faith and that it was actually illegal in the US until the 1960's.

Despite the fact that the Church teaches that it is grave sin, 49% of American Catholics feel that it is okay for an unmarried couple to cohabit before marriage. This percent is consistent with the American population as a whole.

A day rarely goes by where we do not hear about a prominent Catholic politician or judge causing public scandal by taking positions opposite of the Church on life issues such as abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage and embryonic stem cell research.

How are we forming our beliefs on what is right and what is wrong in matters of faith and morals? *By observing what people say and do on TV shows, the movies, and other media?*

Do we get our information on moral issues off of the Internet? There are some great, solid Catholic sites on the internet, however for every good site, there are at least a hundred that defend moral positions that are contrary to Church teaching and nearly 2000 years of Christian tradition.

Do we go to the Bible? Let's see what the Bible says is the source of truth? In 1 Timothy 3:15, the apostle Paul writes that the Church is the Pillar and Foundation of Truth. So the Bible says not society, not the media, not your next-door neighbor, *but the Church alone is the source of truth.*

We refer to this truth with a five dollar word – the magisterium. Magisterium simply means the teaching authority of the Church. This teaching authority relates to matters of faith and morals and resides in the Pope along all the bishops of the Church. This includes the teachings of the Church councils throughout the ages. This DOES NOT include things such as matters of science (for example does the sun revolve around the earth or does the earth revolve around the sun) or Civil Law (what should my fine be for getting caught on one of those dreaded red light cameras ?)

So, where do we as ordinary Catholics not invited to the Church councils and not on a first name basis with the pope or the bishops around the world go to find out what the Church teaches on matters of faith and morals and why it teaches it?

Well the first place you can go is St Luke's Church. You can be certain that with Fr Mark Lomax as your pastor, any answers you get to questions of faith and morals will be consistent with the teachings of the Church.

Another place you can go is the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Every Catholic home should have a copy and should be familiar with its organization and content.

There are a number of good solid apologetic organizations out there. Once that a can recommend is [Catholic Answers](#). They have a great website which explains not only what the Church teaches, why we teach it, but also the history of why we teach it.

Jesus said " "I came into the world to bear witness to the *truth*." Be assured that when you openly seek the truth through Jesus and His Church, you will not be confused as Pilate was when he responded "Truth, what is truth."