

“And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.”

Lk 4:20

We hear much of standards these days: standards in education; standards in health care; standards of the products or services that we buy. The more we hear about standards, the more exacting they seem to become.

The Oxford dictionary gives several definitions of the word *standard* but they all seem to include two main ideas: the quality or measure by which other things may be judged, and a distinctive flag around which people may rally.

When Our Lord ascended back to the Father forty days after His resurrection He promised that He would not leave His followers orphaned, without a father figure. After all, having spent so much of His life – and indeed His death – revealing the Truth to the world, it would seem somewhat pointless if He now abandoned His disciples, leaving them to squabble over the interpretation of what He had taught, or to fight over how they should respond to difficult questions as they arose in the future.

Fully aware of mankind’s weakness and pride and obstinacy, and mindful of man’s propensity to argue and disagree, Our Lord knew that He had to find some way in which the unity He had prayed for at the Last Supper might actually be preserved in practice. How, when His followers became embroiled in dispute, could they be sure of the proper resolution? How could His disciples be assured of an authentic interpretation of His words and actions?

Supernaturally, He sent His Holy Spirit upon the Church at Pentecost, a Spirit that would teach all Truth, as He said the night before He died (Jn 16:13). But how would His followers recognize that Truth? To what could they conform themselves so that they would not disintegrate into numerous factions?

The unity of the disciples would be preserved if, as in the synagogue in today's Gospel passage, all eyes were fixed on Him. But if He were not physically present?

The standard of Truth – the quality or measure by which all opinions should be judged – would need to be borne aloft by a standard bearer. And, in His wisdom, Christ appointed one: “Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church” (Mt 16:18).

Just as in a battle the standard might be fixed firmly on a hill top where the troops could see it and beneath which they could regroup, so Our Lord placed His standard on a hill top for all to see. The hill was situated just outside the city limits, across the Tiber opposite the seven hills of Rome, and it was called *Vaticanus Mons*, the Vatican Hill.

As the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity draws to a close once more we are reminded that not all religions, or even all Christian denominations, are equally reliable paths towards the Truth. Christ alone, as He told His disciples, is the Way, the Truth and the Life; and where there are disputed questions, we must look to the standard bearer of Truth that Christ Himself has given us. Christ's Church does not need to wallow in doubt and uncertainty. Even if we as individuals waver in our faith – or do not understand the meaning of what has been revealed – nevertheless if we remain part of the Church Christ founded we can be assured that fixing our eyes on Christ and on His standard bearer will lead us to the Truth.

When we are confronted by difficult questions in our own day – questions not even dreamt of two thousand years ago – we can reliably be guided by the consistency of the Church's doctrinal Tradition.

The Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is the continuation in time of Christ's physical presence. Because of this, the Church must do *all* and *only* that which Christ Himself did. Christ proclaimed liberty to captives, gave the blind new sight and set the downtrodden free, so does His Church; Christ forgave sins, healed the sick, served the poor and taught the Truth; so must – and does – the Church. The Church must do *all* that Christ did; and she may do *only* that which Christ did.

We need not worry whether Christ was bound by social stigmas or cultural conventions; a God who created the entire universe, was born of a virgin, who rose from the dead and who left Himself to us in the form of bread in the Blessed Sacrament, is not likely to be limited by such human constraints.

If we find ourselves on an intellectual battlefield, we can remain confident that our standard continues to fly as Our Lord promised. We can remain confident that the standard bearer and his successors continue to be the rallying point beneath which we can gather. We can remain confident that Peter continues to uphold the benchmark of Truth against which all opinions must be judged.

By keeping our eyes focused on that standard, on that flag of Truth, by keeping our eyes fixed on our father figure here below – our *papa* in Rome – we know that, like the people in the synagogue, we are keeping our eyes fixed on Christ.