

Fifth Sunday of Easter

The editor emeritus of *Harper's Magazine*, Lewis H. Lapham, graduated from Yale in 1956. At the class's 40th reunion, after-dinner speakers marveled at how the world had changed since they arrived on campus in 1912, when Eisenhower was elected president, a hamburger sold for 25 cents, and a field-level box at Yankee Stadium went for \$5. They spoke of the progress of blacks, women, and gays; the interstate highway system; supersonic air travel; the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King; spaceflight; the Vietnam War; the transplanted kidney; the artificial heart; Watergate; the end of the Cold War; and the Internet. The class secretary said no generation of college alumni had weathered so heavy a storm of social and technological change. Lapham thought it through later that evening. When he received his diploma in 1956, the class celebrating its 40th anniversary had arrived on campus in 1912, the year the *Titanic* sank. He writes, "The turn of events over the next forty-four years encompassed, among other occasions worthy of note, World War I, the Russian Revolution, American women granted the right to vote, Prohibition, the stock market crash of 1929, the Great Depression, World War II, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb." His point is we tend to think our lives are more unique than anyone else's, but they're not. An educated mind places our experience inside the experience of the world.

The same benefit comes from an educated conscience. We're tempted to think we're unique and to judge what is right based on how it benefits us. But, as followers of Christ know, there are other factors. Just as history gives us better knowledge, so religion gives us a better heart. The conscience is present at our heart, and at the appropriate moment it urges us to do good and avoid evil (1777). A conscience has to be formed. Our catechism says, "The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law . . . Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride. . . The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart" (1784).

The First Letter of John, from which we've been hearing this month, has encouraged us to follow the commandments, as today's passage does. We follow them when we make good judgments. Sometimes we wonder if we have reached the truth, and if we have indeed accepted the right and condemned the wrong. If we have a conscience educated according to God's commands, we have nothing to fear. John writes in the passage we hear today, "Now this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts before him in whatever our hearts condemn, for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything."

We often face choices where it's hard to know what is right. We try but fail to find clear guidance in the bible or the teaching of the Church. We are tempted to do what is easy, what feels good, or causes less stress. Sometimes our hearts don't know what to do. But God is greater than our hearts and knows everything. Our problems are never as unique as we think. There are answers in habits of good judgment and the pages of history. If we place our heart inside God's, we will always make the right choice.