This has been a very interesting week of news. All sorts of buzz and stories surfaced about one of the most humble yet courageous, heroic, passionate, multi-faceted and multi-skilled people of all time. He has had us on the edge of our seats most of the week with the things he’s said. Here are just a few of them and I quote, "If the world were perfect, it wouldn't be." And "We made too many wrong mistakes." But he also gave us hope by telling us, "it ain't over, 'til it's over" and "when you come to the fork in the road, take it!" Of course I’m speaking of Yogi Berra who passed away earlier this week.

We have also, however, been on the edge of our seats waiting and listening to one of the most humble yet courageous, heroic, passionate multi-faceted and multi-skilled people of all time in Pope Francis. I have been struggling to keep up with all of this this past week and what I found most interesting is the wisdom of their simplicity. Both Pope Francis and Yogi have spoken volumes in their straight forward, direct and simple ways, even if Yogi claims not to have said half of what he said. More importantly though is that there is a profound wisdom beneath the apparent simplicity on the surface. Even though Yogi Berra’s “Yogi-isms” were probably the words of a man who simply misspoke, the essence of a “real truth”, which itself sounds like a “Yogi-ism”, is present in his statements. Pope Francis likewise has been speaking plainly, directly and with the “real truth” of the Holy Spirit, the Church’s magisterium and Tradition behind him. Now, I’m not equating the two but what makes all of this so
interesting and noteworthy is that it is these kinds of simple and direct truths, sometimes, that become the most challenging to fully understand and accept.

Today Jesus speaks to his disciples and us very simply, very directly and with “real truth” about sin and its sources as well as the reality of salvation and redemption. “Whoever is not against us is for us,” Jesus says. If that doesn’t sound like a biblical “Yogi-ism”, I don’t know what does! The truth of what Jesus is saying though is much deeper; he is saying that HE is the center and source of all healing and salvation. Even those who ACT in his name and in union with his spirit, whether they are professed Catholics or Christians or not, share in Christ’s salvific work and are therefore entitled to a share of it. “There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me.” He says. However he then continues by warning that the one who leads others to sin whether they are professed Catholics or Christians or not, might not only forfeit salvation but will suffer in fiery Gehenna.

The significance of these statements at the time of this Gospel and today could not be more profound.

We are bombarded with various opinions and interpretations of what it means to follow Christ and it can be hard to know whether we are doing so correctly. This is what the disciples in our Gospel and the elders in the first reading struggled with as well. It is no different with us, especially when it comes to the complicated issues we face in the world today. This is why it is important for us as Catholics to look to the Church, which holds the deposit of faith and is the caretaker of Christ’s teachings, to guide us. But it is interesting that many non-Catholics are watching and listening intently as well, as we have seen so clearly this week. After all, these teachings are offered to them as well. This is why I find this Gospel so perfectly appropriate and the pope’s visit so timely and significant.

In my opinion, the significance of Pope Francis’ visit to Cuba and the United States is his unwavering proclamation of the Church’s teaching and willingness to address some of the most controversial issues we face. Yet what I found so interesting is the way everyone attempted to claim that
his words supported *THEIR PARTICULAR POINT OF VIEW* and thus missed the point altogether. In many ways, the world wants to see things as a dichotomy: as this way or that way. The “real truth” of Christ’s message and the message of the Church is that when it comes to many of these issues like Climate change, or immigration, or morality, or global economics, or any of the other issues that seem to force us to choose one side over the other, is that they are actually, from the Church’s point of view, what we call “BOTH-AND” propositions. In other words, there are elements on both sides of these issues that are true at the same time. For example, whether science supports global warming and man’s role in it or not, we have an obligation to be good stewards of creation in order to prevent earth’s destruction or degradation we must see ourselves as, *BOTH* the potential source *AND* the possible solution to the problem (BOTH-AND). Either way we have an obligation to act on behalf of all of these matters.

Likewise, regardless of the mistakes people make as the result of sin, the Church still has an obligation to offer *BOTH* a condemnation of the sin *AND* the mercy to forgive it (BOTH-AND). Don’t be fooled into thinking that Christ’s message is going to be changed or watered down to suit our weak and fickle humanity, rather, Jesus is telling us today that the “real Truth” of His divinity lies in his example and his mercy which we are to emulate THROUGH OUR ACTIONS. Ultimately, we must identify the sources of sin in our lives: those things that draw us and others away from living and acting in his name, and rid ourselves of them with the help of God.

The Gospel today is timely. If we are to take anything away from this gospel or the message of Pope Francis or even Yogi Berra for that matter, it is that below the surface of our experience or point of view lies a truth that is without dichotomy; a truth that BOTH transcends creeds AND yet is *fully* contained within one: the Church. The “real Truth” is Christ, who is also the sole source of our salvation. If we act in his name and with his purpose in an honest, sincere or even accidental way, then we are with Him and not against Him and therefore are worthy of the name disciple. The “real Truth” of this week is that we have been inundated and blessed with two incredible and similar figures who through simple
words conveyed the kind of wisdom that we should all hope to have. I’m going to be honest with you, I never thought I would see anything so profound on TV anymore but if you’re open to it, as Yogi also famously said, "You can observe a lot by just watching."