

## **THE TRUTH ABOUT PLUTO**

Schools across the nation have begun another academic year. Students of science and astronomy will find themselves with outdated textbooks. Those books will be describing our solar system as having nine planets; whereas, we are now told that there are only eight. Pluto is no longer considered a planet.

The International Astronomical Union met in Prague last month and decided that this particular celestial body, discovered only in 1930, does not rate the status that it has enjoyed. Does it now cease to exist? Of course, not. It is what it has always been. We simply understand it better.

Pluto has always been different from the other eight planets. It is further away from the sun than the others. Its orbit, rotational relationship with its satellite, spin axis, and light variations are unique. Perhaps that is why there has been such an outcry over what is considered by many as Pluto's demotion. They like its uniqueness.

This reminds me of the time in our Church when some names of saints were taken off the Church calendar. Similar outcries are heard when translations of Mass parts change or a different perspective is given in regard to some teaching. As we get a better and more accurate understanding of reality and truth, our response needs to be adjusted accordingly. Otherwise, we would be slaves to ideas and not witnesses to fact.

Beliefs do not form reality. Rather, reality forms belief. No matter what one says that Pluto is, Pluto is what Pluto is. There may have been someone who had the legendary experience of carrying a child across a stream, only to have revealed to him that it was Christ. But, probably, his name was not Christopher. There may have been a woman who wiped the Lord's face as He carried his cross, only to discover that He left the image of his face on her veil. But, probably, her name was not Veronica. Those names are descriptive and became a way for us to refer to their actions. Christopher means "one who carries Christ." Veronica means a "true likeness." Nevertheless, what is important is what these individuals' did, regardless of their name. There are now, of course, many Christophers and Veronicas.

Whether it falls within the realm of religion or science, discovering a more in-depth understanding of what we believe to be true should be something exciting and not threatening. Reality is what reality is. Our Creator has endowed us humans with the capacity of delving into his creation and, thereby, coming to a better understanding of him. For that matter, the more we understand him, the more we understand ourselves and the purpose of our existence.

What is Pluto's role in the universe? Even though Pluto is so far out that it takes 249 years for it to orbit the sun (compared to the earth's one year), we know that it is not the edge of the universe. Only the wise person realizes that the more that he or she knows the more there is to find out. If nothing else, the immensity of the universe should cause us to accept our minuteness in the face of the Almighty.