

16th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Matthew 13:24-43

All religions are not the same. In many places, it is popular to teach against this and to argue that all religions are basically the same and, in one way or another, all lead to God. To teach such a thing is dangerous because, like all false doctrines or heresies, the consequences are destructive.

In the reading from the book of Wisdom it says, "There is no god, other than you, who cares for everything" (12:13). As St. Peter said at Pentecost, "For of all the names given in the world to men, [Jesus Christ] is the only one by which we can be saved" (Acts 4:12). St. Paul, when he explained that God raised Jesus from the dead to show that there is only one God, said, "So that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11). And our Lord Himself said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (Jn. 14:6).

In the first parable from this Gospel, the parable of the weeds among the wheat, the Lord teaches that there is a fundamental difference between the weeds and the wheat. The word He uses for weeds, "darnel", is a specific type of weed which looks very much like wheat but is itself poisonous. So in spite of the similar appearances of the weeds and the wheat, one will cause you to live and one will cause you to die.

Talk of heaven and hell usually makes people uncomfortable. Often we only hear of heaven. Very rarely do we ever hear of hell. And that is the great danger of believing that all religions are the same because it becomes easy, then, to pick what is most appealing from each and cobble them together into a type of personal religion. Pope Benedict XVI said that we cannot pick and

choose from our faith, but must persevere in thinking with the Church. We cannot choose to believe in the love and mercy of God and of His forgiveness and refuse to accept the necessity of confession or the damnation that comes with immoral actions. Whatever may be difficult for us in our faith we must embrace just as willingly as we embrace that which is easy. Otherwise religion becomes purely private, “it loses its very soul.” And that is the oldest trick of Satan—it is the trick he played on Adam and Eve.

But we do long for that which is true. It is ingrained in our very souls. Why else are we here? Is it because in spite of our inclination to pride and to sin we really do want to know and to feel that we belong to something greater than ourselves?

The Church has always venerated martyrs, those who sacrificed their lives for the faith. There are many stories of such heroes. For example, St. Victoria, born of a pagan family in the year *A.D.* 300 in Albitina in North Africa, where Christians were violently persecuted and often killed. As a teenager she converted to the Church, falling so in love with Christ that she made a vow of virginity. This, however, greatly upset her parents who had promised her in marriage to a noble and wealthy man. In spite of her pleas against marriage her parents forced her to be with the man. But on the day of her wedding, to avoid the man and her family downstairs, she climbed from an upstairs window and fled to a church, where she was protected. A few years later, whilst at Mass with fifty other men and women, soldiers broke in and arrested her and the others. They were beaten and tortured until they renounced Christ and the Church, but St. Victoria refused. On the day of her trial her brother, still a pagan, pleaded with the judge that his sister was insane, but her own arguments in defence of the faith proved that she knew what she was doing. Even the judge stepped down to beg her to recant the faith and not to throw away her life but she simply said, “I have already told you. I am a Christian. And I attended the Mass.” She was put to death.

Today the persecution of the Church continues and it is already here in this country and is going to get very, very much worse. And while you will not hear of this in the media, it is Christians who are persecuted and killed for the faith more than any other group for any other reason. These men and women and children today, and throughout the history of the Church, have preferred to die rather than to denounce their faith in Christ and the Church because they believed that all religions are not the same.