

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Weeds Among the Wheat

Today I want to speak with you about a real concern we are experiencing in the twenty-first century Roman Catholic Church. This concern confuses our children. This concern steers people away when they want to inquire about the Church. The concern is the negative things that are written or said about Pope Francis, and many of the leaders of the Church, particularly the Bishops of the United States.

How could God let this happen? People need to put their faith in the Church. How could God allow some who claim to be the real Catholics continually discredit Pope Francis, bishops who are not radical conservatives, the American Church, and so forth?

This is a real problem, and it is horrible. I hear confessions. It is not infrequent to hear people confess that they were uncharitable in something they said about the Holy Father and then add, "Even though he is a heretic." I don't let them get away with that. I'll ask, "What? Where are you getting that from?"

"Well, Father, I read this in a highly respected blog."

"Highly respected by whom?," I ask, "the devil?"

Pope Francis was chosen by the Holy Spirit. This choice was confirmed by the cardinals who met in conclave. Perhaps you remember what many of the cardinals said before they entered the conclave. When they were asked, "Who would they choose to be Pope," many of the cardinals responded, "The Holy Spirit has already chosen the Successor of Peter. We are meeting in conclave to pray for the revelation of the Holy Spirit's choice."

Our Holy Father is doing his best to focus the Church on its mission to the poor. He is calling on us to join him in continuing the work of Jesus Christ. Yet, many people criticize him for this. Pope Francis wrote in the encyclical *Laudato Si* about the obligation we have to care for God's gift of creation and to preserve it for future generations. And for this some treat him as an idealistic tree hugger. Pope Francis reminds Catholics of his predecessor's teachings on social justice, Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, Of New Things, Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*, Forty Years from *Rerum Novarum*, St. John XXIII's *Mater and Magister*, Mother and Teacher, St. Paul VI's *Populorum Progresso*, On the Progress of People, St. John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*, Through Work, and his *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, the Social Concerns of the Church. Pope Francis has called for an emphasis on Catholic social teaching. For that some so called super Catholics call him a Communist.

Who do these people think they are? What right do they have to disrupt the People of God, the Church. Don't they realize that they are confusing our children and driving inquirers away from the Church. Don't they realize that they are doing the work of the devil? Why do we have to put up with these weeds among our wheat?

We have to put up with them because many who join in on the blasphemy against the Church are not in their hearts bad people, just misguided people. If they are serious about their faith, they will return to the true faith. Just as there are weeds among the wheat, there is also wheat among the weeds. "Give them time," the Lord says in the parable of the Weeds among the Wheat." "By their fruit we will know them," he says. In time those who are really committed to the faith will produce good fruit, people who are supportive of the work of the Church. And those who are doing the work of the devil will have no fruit to show for their lives.

One of the problems we have in the 21st century is that some people would rather believe outlandish conspiracy theories than learn the truth. Some people would rather believe that there is an organized effort, and here's where they really commit the sin of slander, proclaim that there is an organized effort by people with same sex attraction to control the Church. How sad it is that some people will allow themselves to be duped so easily. The devil is effective with the ignorant.

A second problem of the 21st century is that many people believe what others are saying instead of going to the source. For example, returning to *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis' Encyclical on the Environment, many people claim to be against what the pope wrote in that encyclical, but they never read it themselves. At best they may have read little snatches of it and took the words out of context, but, usually, they didn't read any of it. They base their objections on what others say it said.

Going back to my opening question: "Why does God let this happen? Why does he allow people who claim to be real Catholics discredit the church?" God is aware of the evil in our world. Evil is the price of freedom. If mankind did not have the ability to choose between good and bad, he wouldn't be free. The choice of bad effects all people, but it is the price of having the ability to choose good. The farmer does not refuse to plant because he might find weeds among the wheat. He plants knowing that the result might not be perfect, but there will be wheat.

God created man with the ability to bear fruit. That also gave him the ability not to bear fruit. We call out to God in times of evil. Like the blood of the martyrs under the altar in the *Book of Revelation* (Rev 6:9-11) we ask, "How long, O Lord until you vindicate your people." The Lord responds that he recognizes our suffering and suffers with us, but He will give others time to choose Him and also to be numbered among his wheat. God sees the weeds among the wheat. He also sees the wheat among the weeds. Good people will turn from calumnies against the Holy Father and the Church.

So where does this leave us? What are we to do when we hear people saying negative things about Pope Francis or about the Bishops of the United States, or about the universal Church? Should we just ignore them? No, we should stand up for what is right and true. We are Roman Catholic. We should let those critics know that we stand with the teaching of the Bishop of Rome. We are called to till the soil of the Lord. We are called to bring forth fruit. We can't allow evil to exist when we come

upon it.

The confusion caused by those who would attack the church must be answered with prayer for these sinners and with faith that the Lord who sees all will in the wisdom of His time remove the weeds from the wheat.