

Modern society has become increasingly hyper-sensitive in recent years. There have been several cases where businesses have been shut down before they even open due to a perceived offense by one ethnic group or another. In some cases you cannot even voice an opinion contrary to mainstream ideology without being shouted down. No discussion is allowed.

A report came out earlier this month that described Christians as the most persecuted religious group in the world. While there are many reasons for this, such as political climate, history, and geography, I think there is one reason we cannot discount. Christians, specifically Catholics, profess that our faith not only has the fullness of Truth, but it is different from all other religions in the world.

This belief flies in the face of modern sensibilities. It is popular these days to teach that all religions are the same, that they are just different roads all going to the same destination. This is even taught in some Catholic schools. And for a Catholic to claim that all religions are not the same, and to tell our hyper-sensitive society that it is wrong, is tantamount to poking a tiger in the eye with a sharp stick.

We should not be surprised when we feel the world hates us. Our Lord told us that the world loves only what is its own. And we are not of the world.

But the belief that all religions are the same is a dangerous, false doctrine. And it has destructive consequences.

The Book of Wisdom, from which we took our first reading, speaks of God, the incarnate Word through whom all things were created. It tells us that there is no God besides Him, who has the care of all.

There is only one God, one Lord, Jesus, the messiah, anointed by the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost, St. Peter said “there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Jesus Himself told us, “I am the way, and the Truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but by me.”

St. Paul made this abundantly clear when he explained that God raised Jesus from the dead to show that He is truly the only Lord, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

All religions are not the same. This is a truth of common sense, and a doctrine of the Catholic Church.

So why then do so many people say that they are the same, even teachers at Catholic high schools and colleges? We find the answer in the first parable told by Jesus in today's Gospel.

In the parable Jesus assures us that there is a difference between the weeds and the wheat. The word used in the Bible, translated as weeds, is *darnell*. Darnell is a specific type of rye that is poisonous to livestock. In the early stages of its growth it looks almost exactly like wheat. But even though they look alike at first, in the end the ripe darnell will sicken or even kill you while the wheat will nourish and strengthen you.

Jesus explains that the weeds, the darnell, represent unrepentant sinners, people whose first priority is themselves, who use others for their own advancement or pleasure, instead of serving them. Jesus is very clear that these unrepentant sinners will end up in Hell. Hell is a place of separation from God. There is wailing and grinding of teeth because those souls are painfully aware that God no longer hears them, or even knows them.

The wheat, on the other hand, stands for the righteous, those who resisted the seductions of evil, and the lies of the world. The righteous are those who repented of their sins, and battled against selfishness in order to follow Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us that these will enter into the joy of eternal life, shining “like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

If all religions were the same why would Jesus start a new one? There were plenty already available.

If all religions were the same, the Church would never have survived its first three centuries of existence. The first three centuries of the Church were characterized by waves of persecution during which believing in Christ was a capital offense punishable by death.

The martyrs who give their their lives for Christ, both then and now, do so because they recognize that Jesus is different from Jupiter.

Now, all of this can make us very uncomfortable. Though we may not be of the world we are certainly in the world. And it is hard to resist the tugs of selfishness and sin. After all it sounds so reasonable that we don't want to upset or offend anyone, that we should just be nice to everyone. It is so much easier.

You may know the name Penn Gillette, half of the team of magicians known as Penn and Teller. Penn is the one who speaks. Mr. Gillette is not a friend of Catholics. It is not our belief he has a problem with, he's an atheist, it is how we live our belief. He explained once in an interview that if you saw someone standing in the middle of a railroad track, and they were in danger of being hit by an oncoming train, wouldn't you yell at them to get out of the way? If Catholics truly lived according to what they believe, they would be calling out to everyone they meet, to avoid the oncoming train that will take them to the fiery furnace.

We are not free to pick and choose what we believe in order to be more acceptable to the world. We are here to serve each other and save as many souls as possible. If we choose to accept some doctrines of the Church and reject others, such as the teachings on abortion, marriage, or sexuality, then we put ourselves and those we come into contact with, in danger. By believing that it doesn't matter what religion we follow, that we can even pick and choose among the Christian communities that are not in communion with Catholics, we give ourselves the perfect excuse for doing whatever we please in life. In effect we make ourselves into our own Gods.

And that is the oldest lie, to follow our own will, and become like God. It is a lie because we are already like God, for we are made in His image and likeness.

It is easy to say that all religions are the same, it is hard to follow Jesus.

Claiming that all religions are the same sounds like a nice thing to do, but it isn't. To tell people that their most closely held sacred beliefs are generic, that they are all the same, is the same thing as telling them that those beliefs are meaningless. To claim that resurrection and reincarnation are the same thing, or that Mohammad really did believe that Jesus rose from the dead even though he clearly said he didn't, is arrogant and disrespectful.

It is as if I were to tell you that you may think you like ice cream, but if you knew yourself as well as I know you, you would realize that you don't really like ice cream at all.

So what are we to do?

The truly Christian thing to do is respect other people enough to try and understand their beliefs, that is how we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. And it isn't hard. All human beings share a deep seated need to answer the basic questions in life. Who are we? Where did we come from? What is the secret to happiness?

All religions try to answer these same questions but they give different answers. Sincere respect and understanding, whenever possible, will help create a relationship of openness. When we have established that type of relationship, then we can share the Good News of Jesus Christ with those who do not yet know Him. We do this not only with words but by how we live our lives, with joy.

First meet others where they are, only then, try to bring them a step closer to Christ. That is how Christian missionaries have spread the faith for over two thousand years. And make no mistake, we are all missionaries in a world of unbelievers. The way we share our faith is with respect, understanding, and love.