

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Sixth Sunday after Trinity
July 23, 2017

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Many people assert that Catholicism is no good because some of the people in it are bad. *The New York Times* always considers it a journalism scoop when a writer discovers some of the popes were bad men. At the St Theresa School the children know how to answer that one. I test their skills at thinking logically. I say “I know some kids in your school who are stupid, so your school is no good.” The children don’t let me get away with that. *Nor should they*. And then we talk about the danger of sweeping generalities.

The New York Times was not the first to put questions about the quality of our membership. That honor goes to the original disciples themselves. How could there be briars in the divine field? Or as they put it: “Whence hath it tares?” In some way that is a question you might put every week looking at your little vegetable patch. You left it neat and tidy last week. Now look at it! “When hath it tares?”

Monsignor Ronald Knox once wrote with humor about that phenomenon. He said if you left your umbrella in the vestibule of a Methodist chapel you had a better chance of recovering it than if you had left it in a Catholic Church. Mgr. Knox said the Methodists were quite pleased with him for saying this. But in the parable the Lord Jesus was describing a characteristic of His Church as “the one that has the cockle in it.” He was describing the Catholic Church, where your chances of recovering your umbrella were a bit more remote.

The God of Israel is patient. Thank God He *is* patient! He lets life go on. He does not intervene periodically with thunderbolts. He is not a nervous cosmic tinkerer. He does not constantly fiddle with the controls. Having conferred upon us freedom, Almighty God lives with His choice. Yes, the Incarnation was the decisive remedy for the Fall of man. But it was *a long time coming!* And yes, there will be judgment! But the Lord’s patience is geared to salvation. Meantime, weeds and wheat will grow together. Our job, yours and mine, is not to marvel or whine at the fact but to concentrate on *being numbered with the wheat*.

The Book of Wisdom reminds readers there is no god to whom the Almighty has to prove or explain Himself. He certainly has no need to prove Himself to His creatures! He has no need to show He has not acted unjustly. We tend to think of

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God in terms of ourselves *only bigger*. We sweat and strain and strive to carve out our little niche in order to display some influence over others. So we conclude Almighty God must also strive and manage, only with more power than we have. But the Scriptures insist God's unlimited power is not seen as power at all. When we talk about the attributes of God the very notion of power is irrelevant. *The Book of Wisdom* says to the Almighty "Power, whenever you will, *attends* you." And "But though you are a master of might, you judge with clemency, and with much leniency you govern us."

It may seem silly to say it this way but Almighty God is *sure of Himself*. The Church is a reflection of that fact. Over the centuries she has been called many things, but "squeaky clean" is not one of them! And this doesn't deflect Our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Gospels He goes through His ministry with an absolute reliance upon the sovereignty of His Heavenly Father. There is no panic, no damage control, and no apology, when Judas Iscariot, one of His chosen, betrays Him. For His Own purpose and for His Glory, Almighty God allows the wheat to grow up with the tares. In the parable of the sower Jesus teaches us this very thing. And He tells us to let the truth soak in. He says, "He who has ears, let him hear."