

Today let's look at St. Peter right after he had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In Jesus' name he had just healed a crippled man and then before all the leaders and elders of the people in Jerusalem, he said this of Jesus Christ: ***"There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved."*** To our modern sensibilities these words might sound harsh and exclusive. Is there only one path to salvation? Is Jesus Christ really the only way?

The answer is yes, there is only one Lord and Savior of the whole world as Jesus Christ says of Himself: ***"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"*** (Jn.14:6).

So, if we say that St. Peter's Pentecost preaching is true and all that the Church teaches is true, how is that not intolerant, divisive, and therefore bad? Firstly, because the Church is universal. It is meant for everyone, no one is excluded, everyone is called. But in such a way as St. John Paul II would say of all the truths of faith that the Church *"proposes she does not impose."* The proclamation of the Good News of Jesus is an offer not an imposition.

The Catholic Church does that to make a distinction between the objective truth that She teaches and how people subjectively hear and receive it. For example, is stealing wrong? Yes! Should we judge the soul of someone who has stolen? No! Is Jesus the Son of God, truly a divine person? Yes! Is it any of our places to judge a person who doesn't believe that? No!

In the book of Jeremiah, we hear: ***"More torturous than all else is the human heart...who can understand it? I, the Lord, alone probe the mind and test the heart, to reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merit of his deeds"*** (Jer. 17:9-10). Even in the sacrament of confession a priest cannot judge a person's soul but only tries to clarify for the person what is right/wrong and true/false as best he can. God alone judges the soul.

Therefore, the Catholic Church teaches that *"Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience"* (Lumen Gentium 15). Such people would be saved because of Christ and His Church, not despite them.

Here are a few humbling questions we can ask ourselves when we try to evangelize or when we disagree with others:

Can I find some objective common ground with the person before me? Can I see the good in where they are coming from?

Have I received the Catholic faith as a gift and desire to share it as such? Do I humbly seek truth? Do I know what I believe and why?

Am I ashamed of being a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Friends, the Catholic Church teaches that there is objective truth centered on the Person of Jesus Christ and that all people are called to Him in His Church. Secondly, the subjective response of everyone to this call is judged by God alone. Can we follow the principle the Church uses by proposing the truth with a gracious spirit out of love for our neighbor? May the Lord's desire be our own:

"I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd." - Jn 10:17

God bless!

Fr. Mike