

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME. 2026

In today's Gospel, Matthew 13:43, the Lord Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a wheat field that an enemy has polluted with weeds. In His parable, the landlord decides not to try and separate the wheat from the field until after harvest.

The field is the Lord's visible Church on earth. Not everyone in the field is wheat, actively listening to God's word and cooperating with God's Grace. Some in the field are weeds, despising God's word and acting against the Lord's teachings. But who, exactly, are the wheat and weeds? Until the great harvest, we mortals cannot know. Some may be outwardly devout and also have an inward disposition of charity and humility truly corresponding to their outward appearance; but others, like the Pharisees the Lord Jesus so fiercely denounced, are whitewashed externally, but inwardly are full of filth. Others, sadly, are openly living against the Lord's teachings, and inwardly truly scorn and reject those teachings; others, however, although living wrongly right now, are inwardly struck with contrition, and, like St. Matthew the tax collector, and ready to convert to the Lord Jesus and His teachings, and to do so heroically. We simply do not know who is who. Some are never confronted with any demands for heroic virtue, but live their ordinary, daily Christianity with consistency and fidelity; yet I remember that among the priests at Gorkum in the Netherlands, threatened by Calvinist pirates with painful death unless they renounced their Catholic Faith, there was one priest of quite poor reputation who, finally faced with one decisive choice between death and dishonor, chose death rather than reject the Faith that, until then, he had poorly served. There are some whose consistently faithful daily Christianity was crowned by heroic witness when their backs were put against the wall; but in the same group of priests at Gorkum there was another priest of spotless reputation who, suddenly faced with serious danger, collapsed completely and purchased safety at the cost of both honor and Faith. Until the great harvest, we do not know and dare not guess who in the field are ultimately among the weeds and who are ultimately among the wheat, glorious members of the Lord Jesus Christ's Communion of Saints. He knows, but we do not.

The Lord Jesus knows who truly belongs to His Communion of Saints and who does not. He has not told us who, and strongly indicates that knowing who is who is not in that great company is not our business. Our business is to make sure that, inspired and assisted by the Lord's Grace, and taught and guided by God's word, we are among that number. He does want all to be saved. He gives to all the guidance and strength they need to be saved. Although the guidance and strength are His, the decision to accept that guidance and use that strength is ours. What is our decision?

Our decision is a daily one, of course. Each day, as we make our decision to accept the Lord's guidance and use the strength His Grace provides, the great Communion of Saints, much more a heavenly assembly than an earthly one, cheers us on. We, believing Christians, walking by Faith, can recognize the invisible presence of the whole army of God's elect. Worldly people, trying to walk by sight without the light of Faith, stumble and fall again and again, and refuse to accept the help of those who have gone before us in Christ. That Communion of Saints loves everyone and everything that Jesus Christ loves, and therefore they love us, and will help us, according to God's will, if we let them.

Those who have gone before us in Faith are more alive than we are. In the ghost stories of the heathen imagination, the departed are less alive than those on earth, unhappy creatures,

and possibly dangerous. For the Christian, those who have died in Christ are more alive than we are, joyful beings and certainly helpful.

These joyful, heavenly human beings, God's elect, the Communion of Saints, are the true Church. We, earth's visible Church, are only an outpost, threatened by enemies, and too often betrayed by the grave and even shameful sins of supposed Christians. It is easy for worldly persons to despise the visible, institutional Church. Mocked by the fashionable, bullied by the violent, out argued by the clever, and despised by the powerful, she seems almost absurd. What the fashionable, the violent, the clever, and the powerful, do not know is that behind her, above her, and around her, are a countless throng, clothed in white with palm branches of victory in their hands, supporting and sustaining her. I have felt them. In England's Rievaulx Abbey, brought down to ruin by gross Henry and his minions, I sensed the presence of St. Ailred the Abbot, and felt moved to sit down to read his great sermon on our Lady (in the Breviary it is one of the optional readings for Matins in Commemoration for Mary). Deeply depressed by the horde of thoughtless tourists in the Vatican Museum, I felt tempted to wonder if the whole thing wasn't a museum; but then, in the actual basilica, kneeling as close as I could to Peter's tomb, I was aware of Peter telling me to settle down and grow up. Whatever happens here on earth, the Lord is Risen, and He shares His Risen life with His saints, who win in the end. Joseph Stalin, absolute ruler of the Soviet Union, once asked in mockery, "How many divisions does the pope have?" Yet, only one lifetime later, the mighty Soviet Union is gone; and St. Peter, while in Heaven, is still also in Rome.

The tombs and graves of God's saints are like that. There is a link between their heavenly presence before the Lamb and their earthly remains, which will be recreated in glory on the great day of harvest and Resurrection. To the heathen, cemeteries are to be feared, and so many heathen cultures have required that cemeteries be outside city and town limits, lest the dead disturb the living. To the Christian, cemeteries are places of prayer, reminders of the vast army of the Faithful Departed who love the living.

These thoughts will, I pray, be helpful to the Christian who is persecuted, or at least despised, and who may feel defeated. To belong to the invisible Communion of Saints is to belong to Heaven. Now, the Blessed Apostle John asks, "How can he who does not love the brother he can see, love the God Whom he cannot see?" (1 John 4,20). Similarly, I demand, "How can he who does not love the earthly Church he can see, love the heavenly Church he cannot see?" If you love the Communion of Saints, love its outpost, the visible, institutional Church. Join your fellow believers in divine worship. Do not embarrass them by your bad behavior, and do not throw them away because of their bad behavior. By God's Grace, may we feel some affection for every single baptised Christian, for Baptism makes someone eligible, so to speak, for membership in the Communion of Saints. However imperfect we and they are, we and they form one mystical body in Christ, with all of the Saints made perfect. By God's Grace, let us have sympathy and kind words for all our fellow Christians. Let us be honest, gentle, and friendly with them. Let us pray for them, and do for them such acts of charity that prove the truth of the apostolic promise that if we love one another, God dwells in us, and His power is brought to perfection in us.