

Chaplain's Bulletin September 29, 2024



Dear Folks,

How to think about people who seek God but are not Catholic? First, there is the question of Christians who are not Catholic, and the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*) talks about our relationship with them. Second, there are non-Christian religions and Vatican II deals with that in Declaration on the relations of the Church to non-Christian Religions (*Nostra aetate*). They are both worth a read.

The Catholic faith is the fullness of truth about Jesus, but there is much that is true that our Protestant brothers and sisters teach, and some things that are true as taught by other religions. God gives everyone the light of natural reason, and so it is not surprising that some true things are taught by groups like Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims. Christians and Jews have received special revelation in addition, and it is completed by the Jesus event.

All who are saved, all who get to heaven, do so by the power of the Sacrifice of Jesus, whether they understand it explicitly or not. "And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil (John 3:19)." Our salvation is God's work, not ours. Those who understand who Jesus is and what He is about and choose not to follow Him will be condemned. Those who had not heard about Him, or were taught the Gospel so badly that they could not recognize Him as the light are another story (and I suggest that latter group is huge). That said, we must not get complacent. We don't get to sit back and relax. If you read the Gospels (which I highly recommend!) and take them seriously (which I very highly recommend!!) we are warned that we don't just coast into heaven (See, for example Matt 5:29-30; 7:13-14; 1 Corinthians 9:27).

Jesus wanted His people to be one (John 17:22). I think Satan laughs himself silly every day that Christians are divided and teaching contradictory things. We speak of God's ordaining will, and God's permissive will. His ordaining will is that everything and everyone be all good, but He permits us to do evil, and He will bring good from it.

Other religions can be a gift in certain ways: they can help people whom we have not yet reached (though we need to get on that); they provide a challenge for us to better witness to the goodness, beauty and truth of the faith (easy to get complacent when everyone agrees); they can remind us of aspects of our faith that perhaps we have been neglecting. For example, a few generations back, people told me the Catholic Church did not encourage them to read the Bible. Our Protestant brothers and sisters reminded us of the importance and benefits of reading and being familiar with the Scriptures (and, if you look at Church documents and history, it is a strong part of the Catholic faith).

Having all of these gifts of the Catholic Church is not a privilege that occasions pride, but a responsibility. "Much will be required of a person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more (Luke 12:48)." Think of all the gifts we have been given. What will God expect from us?

Blessings,
Fr. Jim