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There is a beautiful port city on the stiletto of the boot of Italy called Otranto. In 1480, the Ottoman Turks attempted to invade the Italian peninsula, landing south of the city of Otranto. Roughly 12,000 were killed and 500 enslaved. They marched on the cathedral where the archbishop and priests there were all murdered. Eight hundred men were told to convert to Islam or be slain. A tailor named Antonio Primaldi is said to have proclaimed "Now it is time for us to fight to save our souls for the Lord. And since he died on the cross for us, it is fitting that we should die for him." The others gave a loud cheer in support, so they were led outside the city and martyred. Supposedly, a miracle happened during the martyrdom that was so convincing that one of the executioners also converted on the spot and was martyred along with the rest. The 800 martyrs of Otranto, Saint Antonio Primaldi and companions, followed in the footsteps of Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr, by willingly laying down their life for our Lord.

I heard something fascinating on a CD set by a Protestant minister that I've been listening to. It is a 12 disc set of sermons, each one 45 minutes each, so if I run long today that's why. And this thing he said the other day was so amazing to me that I had to grab a Bible and check the moment I got home. When you are reading the story of Genesis every line says the LORD GOD did this and the LORD GOD did that until when Satan appears as the serpent and he just says, "God" because he cannot call God his Lord. He refuses to obey, but as we heard last week, we keep Jesus's word and we do obey because we love him. He is Lord of our life, even to the point of death. This might cause us great suffering at times, or minor irritation at others, but either Jesus is Lord of our whole life, or he is not Lord at all as we choose to remain in control. Fortunately, for most of us, we will probably never be martyred.

When Jesus Ascended into Heaven, he said that his followers were to go to all corners of the world and teach everything he taught. He was so concerned that we all be One, that we know his teaching, that he promised us the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. We await that during these nine days between the Ascension and Pentecost. This is because he wants us to know the truth and act on it. He even compared it to a person building a house. He said if you build on sand, it will collapse from shifting foundations, but if you build on rock the house will stand, so we must build our lives upon the Word of God. Acting on it, building a life on it, is a firm foundation. This aspect was so important to the early Church, the clinging to every word of Christ, that heretics were excommunicated from the earliest days of the Church. Soon after Stephen, people would say that Christ was just a man or not even a man, and the Church would say this was false. It was seen as an act of charity, like telling someone their medical diagnosis. "Bad news: we aren't kicking you out. You have already found yourself outside. Come back to the Truth" Christ prayed all were one, and if someone was going astray, he or she needed to be

told so, for his or her own sake. Truth is One because God is One. Saint Stephen didn't just change his beliefs to be acceptable to polite society. He'd rather die.

Our age, however, is not so certain of the truth. For example, when I teach my class on Catholic social teaching, it is amazing how people consistently say, "We must tolerate all opinions" as an example of justice. I often respond with, "How about \_\_\_\_\_" and insert something I know they find repulsive based on a prior comment they have made that semester, like "racism" or "discrimination" and they say, "Well, not that!" To which I say, "Then you agree we must not tolerate all opinions. What is the higher standard that you are using?" They normally have to stop and think. They have a week to come back with a more well-thought out answer.

You are wondering, "Wait, is Father speaking against tolerance?" Lest I be misunderstood, let me clarify: tolerance is insufficient. The other day while flipping between the three major cable TV networks, I noticed the many rash judgments, uncharitable assumptions, and just plain toxic discourse. I would argue that that is the fruit of tolerance. You see, as one commentator mentioned, "No one tolerates good things like a walk in the park or chocolate pudding." We tolerate what is bad, like a headache at a loud party. Jesus never said to tolerate our neighbors and enemies but to love them! Instead of tolerance, what we need is true love for our neighbor, for if tolerance implies my neighbor is bad and to be put up with, true charity means my neighbor is good and worthy of love despite being imperfect. We are to have the love with which Christ loved us in us to love others. He said that today in the Gospel. That goes beyond tolerance.

And of course, if I truly love my neighbor, then I will want to share this Good News of the Gospel with my neighbor. I will be willing to lose my life for it, for Jesus is Lord and, "since he died on the cross for us, it is fitting that we should die for him." As I said earlier, fortunately,, in our day and age, our Christian brothers and sisters are not going to kill us for proclaiming the truth about the Eucharist or Mary or the Trinity. The reason for that is not a good one. It is because we are not passionate anymore about the Truth regarding the Eucharist or the Blessed Virgin Mary. We all think we are basically the same. Our Oneness is not in the Truth but in our lack of confidence in the Truth.

But in fact, there is something which has begun to unite all Christians, actually people of all faiths in our country, and let me let you in on a little secret: it's been the underlying theme of many of my homilies. It is known as moralistic, therapeutic Deism. A friend of mine is a professor and recently posted that in her years of teaching thus far, six or so students have done their research paper on, "What is MTD?" and concluded, all of them, "I fall into this!" Moralistic, therapeutic Deism is a phrase used to describe what the majority of people my generation and younger in this country, no matter what religion they practice, actually believe.

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to [heaven](#) when they die.

The first part is fine, but notice that point four says God is not really involved much. In fact, God is so intimately involved that he walked among us in the person of Jesus, that he dwells in us, like we heard last week. He guides all things according to wisdom and love so that nothing is outside of his providence. He is very involved! And while true that he wants us to be good, that does not go far enough. God is some external rule like a child being told to raise his hand in class to speak. God built us and the moral law is inscribed in us. It is but more like the car manufacturer telling us how to use the special features in a new car. It is built in, which I have said countless times here. The goal is not being good to conform to some rule but that we might see the glory of God's face, for when we are distracted by other things, we cannot see clearly. When people ask, "Why do I need Church to be good?" the reply is, "Church is not about being good, but even if it were, let me see you try! It is hard enough with grace!" In fact, God wants far more from us than being good. Religion is not about morality. And while God wants us to experience peace, it is a true peace. Sometimes the world offers us false peace, like getting along with lots of underlying tension, or feeling good about ourselves for all the wrong reasons. God reveals to us the truth about ourselves as loved and promises us true peace. He wants us to know that we are beloved sons and daughters, sinners in need of mercy, yes, but loved as we are. Saint Stephen was at peace knowing who he was, so free that he could unite himself to the cross, even to the point of losing his life!

MTD is not the Gospel, which is not just about how to live but about who God is. A God who wants us to experience union with him as we see his glory. The notion that all religions are basically the same and it doesn't matter which one we practice, the tolerance that thinks knowing the truth about God is impossible, is exactly the opposite of what Christ desires for us in John's Gospel, where the Spirit will lead the people of God to know the truth and be one in the truth for God is one. It is so much richer what God offers us! That's the faith Antonio Primaldi, Stephen, Thomas More, Miguel Pro, Agnes, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, Magdalene of Nagasaki, and countless others were willing to lose their lives for. That's the Good News of Jesus Christ.