

God's grace and Jesus' redemption, salvation is offered to each individual. The Gnostic belief that the material world was created evil meant that they denied that it could ever be redeemed; thus, Man needed to escape from the material to the totally spiritual world of the "good" God through knowledge of the divinity within him which enabled him to transcend the material world. The logic of the Gnostic emphasis on personal spiritual knowledge over the teaching and authority of the church left little if any need for the church as institution, or of the sacraments.

Throughout the 2nd century St Irenaeus and other early church fathers such as St Clement of Alexandria, combatted the precepts of Gnosticism which substantially contaminated the church in this period. The further beneficial effect of these refutations was that they assisted the teachings of orthodox Christianity to become refined into an intellectual, rational, fully-developed theology. While Gnostics claimed that certain scriptural writings (in particular in St John's Gospel and St Paul's letters) supported them, it is widely held that St Paul (1 Timothy 6: 20-21) specifically warned against any idea of salvation by knowledge: *"My dear Timothy, take great care of all that has been entrusted to you. Turn away from godless philosophical discussions and the contradictions of the 'knowledge' which is not knowledge at all;"* (Note: This article is based on part of Episode No. 6 in the 2009 Arté TV documentary series "The Apocalypse")
-Stephen S.

Entrance antiphon: Forsake me not, O Lord, my God; be not far from me! Make haste and come to my help, O Lord, my strong salvation!

First Reading: Malachi 1: 14-2: 2, 8-10

Responsorial Psalm: 95: Keep my soul in peace before you, O Lord /R

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2: 7-9, 13

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! Speak, Lord, your servant is listening; you have the message of eternal life. Alleluia!

Gospel: Matthew: 23: 1-12

Memorial Acclamation: Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.

Communion Antiphon: You will show me the path of life, the fullness of joy in your presence, O Lord.



Thirty First Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A, 2023 Weekly

Reflection: Heresies 1: Gnosticism: It may seem odd to devote a short series of articles to heresies. Nevertheless, heresies are important, not only because they were

followed by many seeking to follow Christ, but also since exploration of heresy enables us better to understand the true doctrine affirmed in its place. The truth of Christian teaching is in part defined by what is not true, the errors of doctrine which have been numerous throughout the ages. Jewish teaching mostly dealt with heresy by paying no attention to it in Talmudic literature. Christians, on the other hand, tended to attack heresies by detailed written analysis. It may be that heresy posed more of a problem for Christianity as a new religion, the sole qualification for which was to accept Christian teaching, whereas the qualification for being an orthodox Jew was also racial.

Gnosticism was one of the earliest and most pervasive of heresies. Unlike other heresies it did not have a clear leader or a canon of beliefs. It consisted of diverse groupings of Christians who taught different things, but who had one thing in common: salvation was not through Christ's death and resurrection but through knowledge (*gnosis* in Greek). Gnostics believed that they had within them a secret fragment of divinity which in some way made them consubstantial with the true God. Self-knowledge of this fragment would survive death and lead to salvation. They held that the world was evil, made by an evil creator who must be distinguished from the one true God. This was the primary false teaching, since Christianity, as well as Judaism, requires one God, creator of heaven and earth. A second important element of Gnosticism flowed in part from the first. Gnostics believed that while Jesus had been sent by God to transform the world from evil to good, this transformation was not in accordance with orthodox Christianity. Biblical texts (e.g. the Book of Revelation) reaffirm that it was man's fall that introduced suffering and evil and that God will in due course redeem this material world into a new material world free from evil. Meanwhile, through