

Twenty-Second Week of Ordinary Time (English)
Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Latin)
August 30, 2026
Year of the Church in History

“So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, ‘If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.’”
(John 8:31-32)

Moving forward in Christian History, I would like to move our focus to North Africa. This area was, in many ways, the center of early Christian intellectual thought and spirituality. Many great saints would arise from this area and prove to be a great blessing for all Christianity. There were some few who would begin as great thinkers and, most regrettably, abandon the Christian faith becoming heretics and schismatics. One of these early thinkers was Tertullian.

Let us begin with a brief introduction into who Tertullian was. We may begin by stating the most obvious fact: He was a man of superior intellect. Little is known of his life except those things contained in a brief biographical account provided by Saint Jerome. We know that he was a convert to Christianity. One may guess that this occurred around A.D.196. Prior to his conversion, it is widely accepted that he had been engaged in the practice of law and rhetoric. Most of his life was spent in the city of Carthage. Besides his intellect, Tertullian was equally known for his temper, acuteness, energy, ease in learning and eloquence in teaching. With so much intellectual talent, it is still a puzzlement as to how he would ever abandon the Christian Faith he once protected and hitch his wagon to the heresy of Montanism, which he had so easily disproved earlier in his writings. Some have proposed a reason for this movement with the phrase: A man, due to his excellencies, may think himself a god. Without humility to guide him, these same excellencies may suffer him to be known as a fool.

“But we find even enquiry into our case forbidden: for the second Pliny, while governor of a province, when some Christians has been condemned, some degraded, being nevertheless troubled by their very numbers, as of Trajan, then Emperor, what he should do for the future, alleging that, excepting their obstinacy in not sacrificing, he had discovered nothing else touching their religious mysteries, save meetings before day-break to sing to Christ as God, and to form a common bond of discipline, forbidding murder, adultery, fraud, perfidy, and other crimes. Then wrote Trajan back that this sect should not indeed be enquired after, but, when brought before him, must be punished”
(Tertullian, The Book of Apology Against the Heathen).

We begin our reflection with a question Tertullian sought to provide an answer: “Why do people hate Christians?” To explain his answer, we need to remember that

Christianity was still around 120 years away from being accepted by Roman authorities. Furthermore, Tertullian's question is still very pertinent for our time. Often people have expressed this same question by comparing Christianity to other religious groups. Why are Christians ridiculed and belittled while silence is often heard concerning these other groups?

Tertullian expresses his question using various examples. I would like to highlight two of these. (1) A father has a son who is disobedient, rude and, using a general term, a "brat." This same son encounters and is impressed by a Christian. The son chooses to follow the example of the Christian and becomes a Christian himself. One aspect of Christianity is to follow the Commandments. The son reads this line of the Commandments: "Honor thy father and thy mother" and chooses to do so. The father now has the kind, loving and obedient son he has wanted. Then why does that same father now disown his son because he is a Christian? (2) A ruler or king seeks to care for his subjects. He does all within his power to provide for their needs hoping they in their turn will serve his kingdom to the best of their ability. Place a Christian preacher in the midst of the people who tells them they must follow Jesus by giving what is owed to the king and giving what is owed to God. The king then has the subjects he desires, yet why does he now persecute them as Christians?

For Tertullian, one reason people hate Christianity is that they hate their own idea of what they believe Christianity is. They have never sought to understand what Christianity is, much less take the time to speak with Christians. Rather, they are content with persecuting Christians and encouraging others to act in like manner. Tertullian would go so far as to propose this example: A crime has been committed. To find out the truth, an authority would use those means at his disposal. He may question those accused. In some cases, depending upon the seriousness of the crime, he might even consent to torture to find out the truth. A person is questioned and tortured till one admits the truth. Whereas the Christian readily admits to the truth of being a Christian and then is tortured until they confess something other than what they are. The movement between the two: one suffers until telling the truth; another suffers until they tell a lie.

Tertullian would propose another reason, but that one will remain until next weekend. May God continue to bless you until then.