

Divine Origins

Today we commemorate the memorial of St. James the apostle who was the first apostle to be martyred. King Agrippa who was in charge of Jerusalem and Judea wanted to gain the favor of the Jews so he began persecuting the Christians. St James was one of the first victims and he was beheaded for his faith in Christ.

On a human level, when an institution experiences suffering or when one of its CEOs gets beheaded, then the institution will usually begin to crumble. Even the Scriptures attest to this fact.

In the acts of the apostles, Gamaliel a Pharisee, was addressing the Sanhedrin concerning this new movement of Christians and he said: “look Theudas had four hundred men following him but when he was killed all his followers dispersed. When Judas the Galilean appeared he was killed and his followers disappeared too.”

But regarding this new community formed by a man called Jesus the Christ, he gave them this advice: “Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

But if it is from God...

The Feast of St. James reminds us of many things about the beauty of the Church but today especially, this feast reminds us of the divine origin of the Church. “We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.”

Sometimes in the midst of turmoil in the Church, in the midst of scandals, in the midst of great confusion, we can be tempted to look only at the humanity of the Church. This can lead us to despair, it can make us feel like this ship is sinking fast. But we forget that we are just looking at the clay jars, the earthen vessels. We forget about the treasure inside.

There is a story or parable of a Jewish Rabbi who was speaking to a bishop and wanting to become Catholic in the middle ages. They discussed the tenets of the faith and the Rabbi considered them, but then he told the bishop that he wanted to go see Rome. Now Rome at that period of time was plagued with horrible scandals and so the bishop thought in his mind that this Rabbi would never become a Catholic.

However, several weeks later the Rabbi returns to the bishop after having been in Rome and said, "I want to be Catholic." And the Bishop is surprised wondering, "why? What happened?" The Rabbi responded, "If any other institution was run like the one I saw, it would have folded a long time ago."

Yes we must eradicate scandal, we must encourage reform in the Church, but we must never lose heart, we must never believe that the gates of Hell shall prevail against the Church for "we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us."