

## The Corrosion of hypocrisy

Homily for August 25, 2021

The Queen Mary was the largest ship to cross the oceans when it was launched in 1936. Through four decades and a World War she served until she was retired, anchored as a floating hotel and museum in Long Beach, California.

During the conversion, her three massive smokestacks were taken off to be scraped down and repainted. But on the dock they crumbled. Nothing was left of the 3/4 inch steel plate from which the stacks had been formed. All that remained were more than thirty coats of paint that had been applied over the years. The steel had rusted away.

When Jesus called the Pharisees "Whitewashed tombs," He meant they had no substance, only an exterior appearance.

In our readings for today, we have the contrast between authentic faith and hypocritical faith. This paraphrase of Matthew 23 captures something of Jesus condemnation of the Pharisees in very direct speech. "You're hopeless, you religion scholars and Pharisees! Frauds! You're like manicured grave plots, grass clipped and the flowers bright, but six feet down it's all rotting bones and worm-eaten flesh. People look at you and think you're saints, but beneath the skin you're total frauds.

Jesus then intensifies his denunciation even more when he says, again quoting the paraphrase: You're hopeless, you religion scholars and Pharisees! Frauds! You build granite tombs for your prophets and marble monuments for your saints. And you say that if you had lived in the days of your ancestors, no blood would have been on your hands. You protest too much! You're cut from the same cloth as those murderers, and daily add to the death count.

There was nothing that riled the Lord more than disingenuous religion. It is often I think because of the experience of hypocrisy that turns many people away from organized religion.

The challenge is that it is easy for all of us to fall into the trap of hypocrisy, where we appear one way publically but behind closed doors we are rusting away like the steel smoke stacks of the Queen Mary.

How do we guard ourselves from this kind of hypocrisy? The answer is to pray for the grace to grow in authenticity. This is the theme at the heart of today's 1<sup>st</sup> reading.

To desire authenticity is to pray for a deep love for the word of God. Listen to how Paul states this in his thanksgiving.

***We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.***

When we are truly open to the Lord and take to heart the Bible as the Word of God, the Holy Spirit takes that word and uses it to work in our lives to enable us to grow in true holiness. But here is the second thing about living an authentic life of faith and holiness, it requires great perseverance. Listen again to these words of the Apostle:

<sup>10</sup> You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. <sup>11</sup> As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, <sup>12</sup> urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Notice how Paul describes how we related to the Thessalonians, conduct that was pure, blameless and upright and how in turn they encouraged and pleaded with them to live a life pleasing to God.

Today we are encouraged to be on our guard against the corrosive influence of hypocrisy and so affirm that we have been called into God's kingdom of glory by daily choosing to live authentic Christian lives worthy of God.