

***Homily for August 31, 2017***

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.

Jesus keeps some of his harshest words for religious hypocrites. That is because hypocrites are like those smoke stacks, they have no substance, only an exterior veneer.

In our Gospel yesterday, and today, Jesus has been saying some very harsh things about hypocritical people. At the end of today's parable, he sternly charges:

***He will cut him off and put him with the hypocrites.***

Why is hypocrisy so problematic? Let's think of the word's original meaning. It means to play a part or to pretend. Something that was made clear in yesterday's Gospel when Jesus said of the Pharisees:

***So, you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.***

Hypocrisy is the hiding of interior wickedness under the appearance of virtue. The Lord denounced it especially in the case of the Pharisees (Mt. 23:1–36) as the vice of those who do their good deeds, only in order to be seen by men and not for the glory of God. According to moral theologians, hypocrisy is the fruit of pride. It is a sin against truthfulness, being a lie expressed by external actions with the intention of deceiving.

This form of deception is very much at play in the parable where Jesus speaks of a faithful and wise slave who has been entrusted with his master's household, and then contrasts this with a wicked slave. The wise slave treats his fellow slaves equitably and is deserving of the beatitude:

***Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives.***

This slave truly wills the good of his fellow slaves, whereas the wicked slave has the attitude:

***'My master is delayed,***

and then acts unjustly by beginning to beat his fellow slaves. Little does he realize there will be a reckoning when he least expects it.

At the heart of hypocrisy is the use of religious authority in a way that demands others to serve the one entrusted with influence over others. We know how damaging this kind of distorted leadership can be and is a blight against Jesus and his Church.

At the heart of authentic Christian leadership is the way of seeing authority used in the service of others. When we live, as priest, or people who in our influence as educators, parents, lay leadership, place before us Jesus' admonition:

***Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.***

we will take to heart Moses' words from Psalm 90:

***So teach us to count our days  
that we may gain a wise heart.***

Such wisdom grows as we hear applied to our lives what St. Paul wished for the Thessalonians when he encouraged them:

***12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. 13 And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.***

Growth in holiness is directly proportional to how we grow in genuine love one for another and how we see our present life in light of Jesus' future coming.

The Church is that community where we in the present learn the way of love that will mark the character of our heavenly country.

Those who take this to heart will not be like smoke stacks, that have a veneer of righteousness but no substance. Rather we will want to be like that wise slave who the master will find at work when he comes.