

## **Pastor's Pen: Leaving Lukewarmness Behind**

Many times, I have sworn to myself, that if I ever did publish a book, I would title it "Leaving Laodicea: Embracing Holiness as a Parish." Laodicea is one of the seven churches in the Book of Revelations to whom St John is instructed to deliver a message.

*"To the angel of the church in Laodicea, write this:*

*"The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the source of God's creation, says this:*

*"I know your works; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot.*

*So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.*

*For you say, 'I am rich and affluent and have no need of anything,' and yet do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."*

*Revelation 3:14-17*

The city of Laodicea was known for its spring that ran hot nor cold. It was a very wealthy city. When Christianity was first preached there, it seems it took some root. However, Jesus faults this new church with a lukewarmness that is intolerable. The actual Greek verb, which is translated 'spit out' gives more the impression of projectile vomiting. In other words, like the taste of something utterly revolting, Jesus finds the lukewarm nature of Laodicea to be thoroughly revolting.

### ***What causes lukewarmness?***

When we look at what little we know about Laodicea, we can get something of an answer. If something is lukewarm, it is tepid. Laodicea was a wealthy town. There is no evidence given that the Church of Laodicea knew anything of persecution as did a number of the other seven churches. They were comfortable.

We live in a society that values comfort. We will spend great amounts of money to accrue comfort. We will even simulate comfort by numbing ourselves through chemical addictions. We will simulate comfort through the misuse of our sexuality and the use of pornography. We will seek that which gives us that sense of well-being. To value comfort necessitates a disproportionate focus on the self. The search for comfort will lead to a rejection of what disrupts that comfort. In this rejection, we will compromise away whatever upsets our comfort.

In the same way, we will resent whatever disrupts our comfort. We will blame outside forces for this unwanted intrusion into our comfort (especially God).

For one who values comfort, the role of religion is to merely comfort. The comfortable religious person doesn't seek to grow, but to remain in a state of inert stasis where they drift along as a leaf down a stream. The role of God in such a religion is to rubber stamp whatever theology I cobble together that makes me comfortable. If I do grow, it is completely on my terms and with a predetermined outcome. Again, God's roles are to rubber stamp my efforts and pat me on the head for any effort.

Lukewarmness is a direct result of compromise. Lukewarmness cannot find the intellectual and spiritual honesty to own up to what is actually being done. Since it neither has the coldness of abandonment of faith nor the heat of a truly lived faith, Christ finds it loathsome enough to want to reject altogether. Why not?! Certainly Jesus did not go through the passion, death, and resurrection so that we may be ho-hum about faith and the living out of discipleship.

### ***Lukewarmness breeds indifference which breeds animosity***

Children pick up what we as adults are truly excited about or find important. They will see this on how we live, on what is chosen as a priority, our words/attitudes about things, and our willingness to donate time, energy and resources to a cause.

By the same token, children also pick up what isn't worth their time or energy. What the adults in their life are lukewarm about will pass on and deepen into indifference. What the child witnesses to be burdensome, of lesser priority, or unimportant will be passed on down. This indifference leads them open to going one step further into an animosity toward whatever is at hand.

We see this in study after study about faith. For example, studies on Church attendance show a progressive slide from one generation to the next. There are multiple factors that contribute to this, but one of the most dominant is the attitude towards God and faith. When a parent is indifferent or seemingly goes through motion, it says something powerful to their children. Statistically, this is especially true of the attitude of the dad.

Lukewarmness of one generation provokes the next generation to drift even further away. There is something innate in our nature that abhors going through the motions. This is especially true with younger people. It seems to be inauthentic. Why bother with such drudgery?

Hence, lukewarmness is the devil's playground. It is why Jesus shows such a viral antipathy to it. Lukewarmness provides fertile ground for doubt, disbelief, and inevitable rejection of faith.

However, Jesus would not warn Laodicea about their lukewarmness if it were irreversible. It is reversible. In the next few weeks, I am going to reflect on how we leave lukewarmness behind. I am a big believer in the fact we cannot complain about behavior we enable. As a pastor, I want to see every aspect of who we are as a parish - outreach, education, devotion, worship, formation of our youth, and social support to roar like a lion.

No parish should be comfortable living in Laodicea. No family should be comfortable living in Laodicea. No individual should be comfortable living in Laodicea. On all levels, it is far past due time to shake off the dust of Laodicea and forge boldly ahead.