

### **Pastor's Pen: Leaving Lukewarmness Behind Part 3**

In the Book of Revelations, when Jesus is speaking to the Church of Laodicea, He is speaking to a single parish in modern terminology. The parish of Laodicea has become lukewarm. They enjoy tremendous wealth and are spared the persecution many of their sister parishes in the same region are undergoing. The lukewarm nature of Laodicea is so revolting to Jesus that He says He spews it from his mouth. However, He gives them three ways by which to rectify their revolting situation.

#### ***“But From Me Gold Refined by Fire”***

Jesus' first antidote to their disease of lukewarmness is to “buy from me gold refined by fire if you would be truly rich.” Mind you, they are already fiscally rich. But Jesus sees them as spiritually poor. He encourages them to seek spiritual wealth. Their wealth, though, comes from “gold refined by fire.”

When gold is mined, it is not pure. Grains of dirt and other impurities exist within the nugget. For gold to be refined, it must be heated up to melting. In that stressing of the gold, the impurities are burned off and all that remains is the gold. Unlike the other churches/parishes in the area, Laodicea is spared persecution from outside. The external sources which would help to purify them are not there as they are in other areas.

Not much has changed over two thousand years. There are Catholic parishes around the world where the Church is being persecuted by outside sources. One can look to Mexico, where drug cartels are killing priests (two in last few weeks) while they are getting ready for Mass or hearing confessions. One can look at Nigeria, where, again, this last weekend, two priests and numerous parishioners were murdered in an attack. In this country, we have no such attacks taking place. That doesn't mean there aren't attacks.

Our attacks are much more subtle but every bit as potent. For Laodicea, their attachment to the wealth and other benefits they enjoyed became the source of their lukewarmness. When I do not have to choose God or something else at the point of a sword, it is much easier to not choose God. The pressure to choose other than God comes from a desire towards the things of this world. That desire leads to a constant compromise of matter of God and faith. Priorities follow suit. Faith gets reduced to “putting in my time” at Mass (maybe...unless something else more important comes along). The more we compromise, the more lukewarm we become. We know from this passage that Jesus finds such lukewarmness revolting enough to want to vomit from His mouth. What then is this “gold refined by fire?” Where do we get it? How do we get it?

#### ***Refined by Fire***

In these simple words, Jesus is telling us that we must be purified as gold is. That is not easy. In fact, the refining process essentially changes the gold nugget. By the same token, the refining or purifying process means a drastic change. To those who understand the language of the Church, this should be no surprise. During the liturgical season of Lent, we focus on the purifying elements. In embracing fasting, abstinence, prayer and alms-giving, these become the fire by which we become purified. All of these speak to an idea

important to purification and refining: detachment. The gold cannot hold onto its imperfections and debris and still become pure. These spiritual practices, while highlighted during Lent, are not exclusive to Lent. In detachment from the things of this world, we learn proper use of these things and where on the scale of priority they should actually be. Detachment leads to a proper re-ordering of our lives toward God and shakes off the grime of lukewarmness.

Notice though, that Jesus tells us to “buy from me” this gold. It is more than our own efforts. We need the grace of God to do any of this. God gives us the grace to build the virtues of prudence (knowing how apply wisdom to choices and priorities) and temperance (self-control). God gives us a forge to purify ourselves of lukewarmness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Part of that sacrament is the desire to amend one’s life and to use the grace of God to not go back to the trough from which one just repented. Reconciliation, like all avenues of grace, is to disrupt this path of lukewarmness. However, to disrupt that path necessitates choosing a better, more worthy path.

### ***Refining is Difficult***

To leave lukewarmness behind means an essential change of priorities. If we are to change these priorities, it will make us stick out. This is why it is difficult and does court a degree of persecution through ridicule or persecution. It comes in the form of a young man I know who had to choose between weekend Mass and a job that constantly and intentionally prevented him from going to Mass. It comes in the form of a teen I knew that to go to church youth events meant being threatened with his starting spot on a team (the coach was Catholic...let that sink in). It comes in the form of a young lady having to choose being with her friends for a party or attending a necessary workshop to work with youth in the parish. It comes in the form of a sports family who makes the effort to go to Mass while on the road, even when they are the only ones of their group that do. It is all about the hard choices.

The lukewarm or cold will immediately go to that which compromises the practice of faith. Sometimes the choice results in good. The young man quit his job and found a better job. Sometimes it is difficult. The teen did lose his starting position. He became a better man for it. The lukewarm will look for an excuse, the courageous will stand tall.

Our own willingness to stand tall in the midst of this refinement becomes a lesson for those placed in their care. Lukewarm parents will usually (not always) raise lukewarm children at best or kids that just abandon faith altogether at worst. Part of parenting is to expose that life is full of hard choices and what one chooses as priorities says much to the character of the person. Our choices, when it comes to our Catholic faith, either expose a fire from within for God or expose a lukewarmness that places faith and God as a lesser priorities. Maybe it is that flavor of playing second fiddle to the world that makes Christ want to spew us from His mouth.

Christ doesn’t ask of us what He Himself has not given. In His proclamation of the Gospel He gives us a way of life. In His Passion, Death, and Resurrection, He makes clear that we were so much a first priority that He is willing to pour out His own life for us. In the constant access He gives us to the Holy Spirit, especially in the sacraments, He makes clear how much He wants to be a part of our lives. In the face of such love, we can now see why such lukewarmness would be revolting and offensive to Jesus?