24th Sunday after Trinity
Bessemer - 1959

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

Revelation 3: 14-16 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth.

THE FATE OF A CHURCH WITHOUT FIRE

During the past weeks we have been considering the various marks and characteristics of the Christian Church.- in its worship, the expansion and extension of its borders, its genuine concern for the spiritual well-being of its members, and its display of love and forgiveness under the cross of our precious Redeemer. Today we would hear a word of warning from the lips of our exalted Lord Jesus, who is the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. Let us listen carefully as He points out to us the fate of a church without fire - without the fire of love and total commitment and eager service. This word of warning fits well with the Collect for this Sunday, in which the Church prays: Stir up...O Lord, the wills of Thy faithful people. We ask God to stir us up that we may plenteously bring forth the fruit of good works We are thus pleading that God would set us on fire for Christ, and that this fire might show itself in our lives. In today's Epistle we find Paul praying for the the church at Colossae that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strenghhened with all might, according to His glorious power. In other words, Paul is praying that this church be set on fire for Christ and the cause of Christ. In the Holy Gospel we heard of two instances in which the fire of faith brought remarkable miracles. All this combines to burn into a blaze our hearts the divine fact that the church that is really filled with the fire of faith and love for Jesus can do the seemingly and humanly impossible. But what of the church that is without such fire?

It has been said that ours is an age that thinks of religion as a pretty good thing and then does nothing about it. The late Karl Heim, distinguished German theologian, said this about our century: Religion is universally tolerated and widely ignored; occasionally it is discussed - dispassionately. But the rest is silence. And who will deny the truth of what he says? By and large the people

of today accept Christianity as a fine thing, but nobody wants to become overly involved. A man says perhaps: Church is all right for my wife and children. In fact, I want my children to go to church. But it's not for me. It's not that I have anything against the church, mind you. I just don't want to get involved. Another says, I'll join the church; it seems like the thing to do. But don't expect me to do anything. Don't expect me to be in church every Sunday or take a active part in the affairs and functions of the church. That's too much!

Such was the condition of the church in Laodicea. This church had not been infected with the poison of any special sin or error. We read neither of heretics nor of persecutors. But the tragedy of this congregation was that it wa neither cold nor hot. They lacked wholeheartedness; they lacked fire; they lacke full commitment to Christ. And for this reason the Lord Christ brings upon this church the fearful judgment: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth. The picture is undoubtedly taken from the mineral springs that lie in the vicinity of Laodicea. It is as if Christ were saying: Sometimes when a man goes to drink of the medicinal springs, the tepid and ill-tasting water makes him want to vomit; that is the way I feel about a church that is neither cold nor hot, but only lukewarm. When it comes to the food we eat, as a general rule we want it either cold or hot. A lukewarm glass of water, for example, loses its refreshment. A cup of coffee or tea that has cooled off from standing too long has a most nauseating taste. The plain fact is that in Christianity there is no room for neutrality. The person who is not for Christ is against Christ. The very expression a lukewarm Christian is a contradiction in terms, for a lukewarm Christian has notclaim to Christ at all.

It is very likely that the people of Laodicea drew the line when religic began interfering with their business and pleasure and social interests. This all-too-common feeling is very apparent in the church of today too. As someone has said: Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade the

sphere of private life. A decent respectability is all right and even much to be desired, but a religion which is like a fire in a man's bones and which pervades every part and corner of his life - that is a different thing altogether. There is such a thing as a kind of common-sense religion. The Ten Commandments are doubtless very proper; but when it comes to an enthusiasm which demands that we love our enemies, and give our goods to the poor, and pray for the people who insult us - that is a very different matter. Laodicea is condemned because she preferred a respectable morality to a passionate Christianity.

The whole attitude of Laodicea was that it could cope with life quite well by itself. That is no uncommon attitude. So long as things go well, all of us are inclined to think that we can do without God. But let disaster strike, an watch the people flock to God on bended knee. During the last war a battle-worn American soldier made this assertion: There are no atheists in foxholes. Let death come to a house, and the people in it who have been very indifferent toward the Church want the Church and the comfort which only the Church can bring. It is one of the great lessons of life that there are certain experiences from which it takes God to rescue a man, and it is the experience of life that these things come to every man sooner or later. And when they do come, all the money in the world will not enable a man to deal with them by himself.

In this world there are always two points of view - the human and the divine. From the purely human viewpoint a man may be very successful, and from the divine point of view he may be a complete failure. There is an old legend about a wealthy and selfish woman who died and reached heaven. She was told that she would be taken to the house which had been prepared for her. She passed many beautiful mansions and saw in them people whom in the world she had known and despised. Finally on the very outskirts of heaven she was shown a very small and undistinguished shack and was told that it was hers. When she complained and protested, she was told quietly: That is all we could do for you with the material you sent up. It is easy for a person to enrich his material life and at the same

time to impoverish his soul. He can forget that he has a soul and discover too late that his soul is that part of him which matters most of all. As the Spanisl proverb grimly puts it: There are no pockets in a shroud.

The trouble is that all too often we fail to be really and deeply impressed with the marvel of the Cross. Our hearts do not beat and thump and pounc with the excitement of an amazed wonderment at the fact of our redemption. We a inclined to say quite glibly: Believe me, God, I appreciate what You have done fc me and all. It was nice of You to send your Son into the world to redeem me from sin, death, and the devil. But don't expect me to do hand-stands or turn cartwheels or shout my lungs out in jubilation. Don't expect me, like Paul, to be a fool for Christ and the Gospel. I like being a member of the Church and knowing of Your great love, but that's as far as it goes. And that is precisely where it ends. Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth. Is it not true, perhaps, that a lost and dying world continues to be unimpressed with the glory of the Christian Church because there are so many lukewarm Christians? Could it be that people you know personally - a husband or wife, perhaps, sons or daughters, relatives or friends or neighbors - are still outside the Kingdom because they have failed to see in you a driving enthusiasm and inner compulsion that has set you ablaze with the fire of love and dedication for Christ and His Cross? Are we always fully aware of the fact that souls are at stake?

One longs today to see robust and virile men and women bringing to Jesus Christ their thoughtful and total commitment. Jesus asks for this. He even says that if we will not be hot - boiling hot - He would prefer us cold to lukewarm. We do more harm to the cause of His Kingdom marching under the banner of His Church as lukewarm, uninspired, non-consecrated soldiers than we would if we were to take our stand on the other side, completely against Him. If Christ is true; if He is the Son of God who died for the sins of men; if Christmas and Good Friday and Easter are more than meaningless anniversaries, then nothing less than our

wholehearted commitment to Him will do. I must put Him at the very top of my life, seeking His glory and obeying His will. It is better to be icy in my indifference or go into active opposition to Him than to insult Him with a lukewarmness which nauseates Him.

As your pastor and as one who is deeply concerned about your eternal salvation, I ask you to take this warning to heart. It is not my warning, but the judgment of the Christ who loves you, who bled on the Cross that you might be His very own. It is His love that must constrain us, that must set us on fire! Let us then pray together fervently - for one another: Stir up, we beseech Thee, O Lord, the wills of Thy faithful people that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of Thee be plenteously rewarded.

Amen.