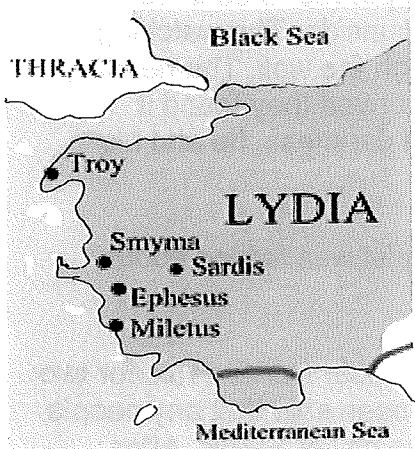


Homily Guide
Sunday, April 10, 2011
Fr. James Flynn

Apathy



“A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within.” Will Durant - Philosopher and Historian

In Chapter 3 of the book of Revelation St. John writes to the Church of Sardis. Sardis is a place that most of us have probably never heard of or read anything about, but to a first century Roman this would have been a familiar place. 700 years before St. John wrote the book of Revelation, Sardis had become one of the greatest cities of the world. Ruled over by the king of Lydia (Modern day Turkey), it had magnificence and luxury and nearly unlimited wealth.

Sardis was also a great military power, which is really no wonder when you understand that it stood in the midst of a river plain on a plateau some fifteen hundred feet above the valley. The sides of the plateau were sheer cliffs. An enemy could be seen approaching for miles all around. The city was nearly impregnable. Looking at Sardis from a distance was like looking at a gigantic watchtower above the Hermus Valley. Sardis grew until it could no longer fit on the plateau and the building spilled over into the valley below. Now it became a two-tiered city - upper and lower Sardis. A river that was said to contain gold bisected Lower Sardis. The greatest of the kings of Sardis lived at the time of the discovery of this gold. His name was Croesus (Kree-soos).

Croesus and his people were extremely rich, but their wealth brought them down. As they settled more and more into lives of falsely secure luxury and splendor, they became soft and flabby. Their society was degenerate. Smug in their self-confidence, they thought their wealth would last forever.

In his haughtiness, Croesus recklessly declared war on Cyrus of Persia. In order to get to the armies of Cyrus, he had to cross the Halys River. He took counsel in one of the idol's temples about the battle and was told, "If you cross the River Halys, you will destroy a great empire." He never considered that the empire destroyed would be his own.

Croesus was routed when he crossed the River, but he was not worried. He simply had to retire to the citadel of Sardis, recoup, refit, and fight again. But Cyrus laid siege to the city. He waited fourteen days, then offered a special reward to anyone who could find an entry into Sardis.

One of soldiers in the army of Cyrus noticed that the composition of the rock on which Sardis stood had cracks and faults in it. One evening as he stood watching the wall above, he had seen a Sardinian soldier drop his helmet off the edge. The soldier made his way down what appeared to be a crack below the wall, emerged outside, retrieved his helmet, and disappeared back inside. The watching warrior reasoned that there must be a crack large enough to let a man through the wall. The next night he led a party of Persian troops up through the fault in the rock. When they arrived they found it completely unguarded and the soldiers of the city asleep. Under the cover of darkness, he and his men opened the gates of the city and Sardis was sacked that night.

A city with a history like Sardis would certainly understand what the risen Christ was talking about when He said, "Wake up!"

That isn't the end of Sardis' story, though. The city disappeared from history under Persian rule for two centuries until it fell to Alexander the Great and became a Greek city. It has been said that any people who forget their history are doomed to repeat it. History did repeat itself in the city of Sardis. After Alexander died, his generals fought each other to determine who would become the new ruler of Greece. One of the rivals, Antiochus, became the ruler of the area that included Sardis. At war with another of the rivals, he sought refuge in the city of Sardis. For a year he managed to defend the city, then one of the soldiers of Antiochus repeated the exploit of Cyrus. At night a band of soldiers crept up the steep cliffs and entered the city through a crack. There was no guard. The Sardians had forgotten the lesson. The city fell again that night because they were not watching.

In due time the Romans came. Sardis became a Roman town. In A.D. 17 it was hit by an earthquake and demolished. Tiberius the Emperor made Sardis tax-exempt for five years and donated money to rebuild the city. Sardis recovered the easy way.

By the time John wrote what Jesus told him to write to Sardis, the city was again wealthy and severely degenerate. Once again, the Sardians were soft. Twice the city had been lost because its inhabitants were too apathetic to keep watch. Once again an attitude of smug apathy prevailed. Within the city was a church, the church of Christ of Sardis. It too reflected the degeneracy of the time. It was lazy and apathetic. It too was not watching. It too was about to fall.

Apathy is a compound word: "a" meaning "without" and "pathy" meaning "feeling." It means literally, "without feeling." It has no passion and no opinion. Its bywords are:

- "I Don't Care"
- "I Don't Want to be bothered"
- "I Don't Know and I don't want to know"

