

SHIPWRECK

Scripture Reading: Read 1 Timothy 1

Earlier this year, the world looked on with horror as the cruise ship, Costa Concordia, ran aground off the coast of Italy and capsized. The cause of the shipwreck, according to the investigation, was “significant human error” on the part of the captain, Francesco Schettino. He took the ship too close to the shore, lied about the ship’s condition when questioned by emergency personnel, abandoned ship before the passengers were off and failed to follow standard emergency procedures. His failures cost the lives of over 30 people.

Shipwrecks are horrible events. Whether it be the Costa Concordia this past January or the Titanic one hundred years ago this past April, shipwrecks usually result in the loss of life and property. Spiritual shipwrecks are no different. Take a look at what Paul has to say in today’s chapter reading: *“Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.”*

Paul challenged Timothy to remain faithful to the truth of God. Likening the Christian life to a battle (“fight the good fight” is literally “war the good warfare”), Paul challenges Timothy to hold on to faith and to keep a clear conscience before God by doing all the Lord called him to do with a pure heart. Sadly, however, there were some (probably the false teachers in Ephesus were on Paul’s mind) who had abandoned the truth and defiled their consciences. In so doing, they had shipwrecked their faith. They had crashed along the rocks and their lives were in danger of being lost, not to mention that they were leading astray those under their care in the church. To rectify this, Paul excommunicated two such individuals: Hymenaeus and Alexander. By removing them from the safety and fellowship of the church and putting them back under the realm of Satan, Paul was not so much trying to punish as to provide discipline leading to repentance (like he did with the sinful man at Corinth in 1 Cor 5). He didn’t want these two to go down with the ship.

Francesco Schettino sailed dangerously close to the Italian island of Giglio because he wanted to provide a spectacle for a crew member who came from the island. He didn’t take seriously the dangers that lurked in the waters. If, instead, he had remained vigilant in his duties as captain, the lives of his crew and passengers would have been saved from shipwreck. Through Paul’s words to Timothy, his young son in the faith, we too are challenged to remain alert and steadfast, holding on to faith and a clear conscience as we fight the good fight lest we crash along the rocks and shipwreck our faith.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Evaluate how close you’re getting to the “rocks” that could gash the “hull” of your life. It’s dangerous to play with sin, to deviate from the course of truth and to serve as the captain of our lives. It’s better to remain linked with Jesus and his commands because Captain Jesus will always get us home safely by faith. Repent if you’ve been off course and pray for a restoration of a clear conscience before God.

Take-a-way: *Shipwrecks can be avoided if we keep following the Captain’s orders.*