

Distrust aboard a Ship

The late Bishop Horatio Potter (1802 – 1887) was an Episcopal Bishop in the Diocese of New York. He conceived and founded the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, the largest cathedral in the Western Hemisphere, though he did not live to see the foundation stone laid.

On occasion, Bishop Potter would tell a story on himself – one that is instructive for us all.

During his career, Bishop Potter traveled to Britain several times. In addition to reasons of ministry and business, these trips enabled him to meet the woman who would become his second wife. His first wife, Mary Jane Tomlinson, died in 1847, leaving six children. In 1853, he married Mary Atchison Pollock, whom he had met on a tour of Scotland.

On one of his ventures, he was sailing for Europe on one of the great transatlantic liners of his day.

When he went on board, he found another passenger was to share the cabin with him. After going to see his accommodations, Potter came up to the purser's desk and inquired if he could leave his gold watch and other valuables in the ship's safe.

He explained that ordinarily he never availed himself of that privilege, but he had been to his cabin and had met the man who was to occupy the other berth and, judging from his appearance, he was afraid that he might not be a trustworthy person.

The purser accepted the responsibility of caring for the valuables and remarked: "It's all right, Bishop. I'll be very glad to take good care of them for you. The other man has been up here and left his for the same reason."

We can chuckle at the story Bishop Potter shared, but we can all acknowledge the tendency to judge people for appearance and other external reasons.

Opportunities for judging others are readily available. A summons for jury duty expects us to impartially judge the culpability of an individual. During an election, we judge each candidate's integrity. But our fondness for judging others extends far beyond legal or civic matters. People are especially good at speaking out against all kinds of things they find offensive. Sadly, their focus may center on the person instead of the action.

Obviously, we make judgments every day. We judge between right and wrong, dangerous choices from safe ones, etc. Jesus cautions us to not judge others in a hypocritical way. He is telling us to take the log out of our own eye so that we can help the other person with a splinter in his. We shouldn't be habitually critical of someone when our own sin needs corrected as well.

Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven (Luke 6:37 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter