

Homily-WhoDoYouSay...  
Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Sunday, August 24<sup>th</sup>

In today's Gospel Jesus wants his disciples to know who he is. And so he asks them, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" The disciples answer, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Jesus knows that these answers are incomplete in explaining who he is and so he asks the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" I believe Jesus asks us the same question. "Who do you say that I am?" Jesus wants to know that we know who he is.

#### WHO IS JESUS TO YOU?

It is good to reflect on our answer to this question. Who is Jesus to us? Through our baptism we become and are called to be the Body of Christ. Therefore we cannot live out our baptismal call without knowing Christ and living out his values in our personal lives.

We cannot know who we are called to be unless we know who Jesus is. We are to base our lives on the life of Jesus. Jesus is to be the model of our lives. Who was Jesus? Jesus was a teacher who proclaimed the kingdom through his actions and through his words. Jesus proclaimed that happiness came from totally depending on God. Jesus was a man who brought healing to those who suffered. Jesus both forgave sins and preached repentance. Jesus fed those who hungered both through his word and through bread. Jesus preached the danger of wealth. Our entire lives were to be placed in the hands of God. Jesus preached love. The life of a follower of Jesus was to be based on that love. Our final judgment is to be based on the mercy that we actively show to others. Do we base our lives on the lives and value of Jesus?

#### PETER THE FIRM FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

Peter answers Jesus' question in the following way, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus recognizes that God has revealed this answer to Peter. Therefore Jesus declares that Peter is rock and on this rock Jesus will build his church.

Peter becomes the firm foundation upon which the Church is established. I find it significant that Jesus builds his church upon the life of Peter. The Gospel accounts are clear that Peter is an unlikely candidate for the one who was to be the first leader of the Church. Two weekends ago we heard the story of Jesus walking on the water and Peter asking to walk on the waters as well. As a result of his lack of faith Peter begins to drown. Jesus saves Peter as a result of his lack of faith. Shortly after Peter reveals that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus will reveal to the disciples that he is a Messiah that must suffer and die before he rises. Peter becomes an obstacle to Jesus' mission and says, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." During the trial of Jesus Peter denies that he even knows Jesus three times. The statement of Jesus to Peter is one which should give much hope to us as it shows that Jesus can use us in powerful ways in spite of our lack of faith.

How is it that the Peter that we encounter in the Gospels, a man who lacks faith, is able to be the firm foundation upon which the church is built?

The answer is seen in two experiences of Peter. The first comes from the Gospel of John. In that Gospel the resurrected Christ appears to Peter and asks him three times if he loves Jesus. "Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than these? Yes, Lord; you know that I love you. Feed my lambs....Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep." Peter is able to be the rock upon which the church is built because he experienced the risen Christ as a source of forgiveness for his sins and shortcomings.

Peter is also able to be the solid foundation upon which the church is built because of reception of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. On Pentecost Peter receives the gift of the Holy Spirit and is able to immediately proclaim the Good News of the salvation of Jesus Christ to the crowd outside of the upper room.

As a result of his encounter with the risen Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit Peter is able to proclaim the Good News of salvation to the crowds; make various missionary journeys to Corinth, Antioch and Rome; to lead the Church; to write a pastoral letter and to suffer imprisonment and martyrdom.

In spite of our weaknesses and sins we are able to complete God's plan for us as a result of the work of the Risen Christ and the Holy Spirit in our lives. The story of the leadership of St. Peter after the resurrection is a story of the power of God's grace working in a man who was weak and fragile. God looks into our lives and knows our weaknesses and sinfulness. Nevertheless He chooses to use us to build up his church. God's use of us can only come through God's grace.

## PROMISES TO PETER

Jesus then promises that the gates of the nether world will not prevail against His Church. The powers of sin and death will not prevail against the church. There is no power which can overcome the church. Jesus then gives the keys to the kingdom of heaven to Peter. The giving of the keys reminds of the first reading in today's liturgy. In the first reading Shebna was one of the court officials of the kingdom of Judah who had tried to persuade King Hezekiah to revolt against Assyria and to send for Egyptian support, directly opposing Isaiah's policy of non-involvement. The King then gives the keys of Shebna to Eliakim. Keys are a symbol of the authority of the mayordomo. The keys represent the authority that the mayordomo has either to grant or deny admittance to the royal presence.

Jesus then says to Peter, "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Jesus is referring to the teaching authority of Peter and is saying that God will stand behind the decisions of Peter.

## GOD BUILDS HIS CHURCH

The promise that God makes that he will build his church upon Peter reminds us that it is God who is the Master Builder. God began the construction of His Church by making Peter the firm foundation upon which His Church was to be built. It is imperative to remember that it is God who builds the Church. Just as God began to build his Church on Peter, so now God continues to build His Church. Only now God continues to build His Church. We are the living stones that God uses to build the church.

We are empowered to allow God to build the Church through our baptism and confirmation. The newly baptized are told before Confirmation: "The promised strength of the Holy Spirit, which you are to receive, will make you more like Christ and help you to be witnesses to his suffering, death and resurrection. **It will strengthen you to be active members of the Church and to build up the Body of Christ in faith and love.**" We are to allow God to work through us as we work to build up the Church.

Last week about 80 parishioners signed up to assist the youth ministry of the parish. This is one way in which parishioners are working allow God to work through them in building up the Church. We are to see that just as Peter had the strength to lead the Church through the gifts of the Holy Spirit so we are to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit in building up our parish community and in so doing to build up the Church.

Certainly another way in which we are called to build up the Church through our local community is through volunteering to assist with the liturgy. In each of our liturgies we are in need of Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, Altar Servers and Ushers. Will we use the gifts that God gives us in order to build up our parish.

This Gospel reminds us that God can take the most unlikely person and make them a strong and wise leader. Let us have faith that God can call and use us. How do we hold back from allowing God to use us to build up His Church?