



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG

# FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL  
GROUP CATECHESIS

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR A



Perugino, Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter, Sistine Chapel, 1481-83, fresco (Vatican, Rome)

## SUNDAY GOSPEL

### *Identity*

MATTHEW 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are

the Christ,' he said, 'the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.' Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. ■

## GOSPEL REFLECTION

*Sr Sue Barker SGS*



What a bundle of contradictions is Peter! At times, he is hot-headed, impulsive; at others, obtuse and unable to understand. He

will later declare his undying loyalty to Jesus at the Last Supper and then deny him three times. Yet in this incident,

it is Peter who speaks the words of wisdom and faith which could only be inspired by the Spirit, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is this same imperfect, weak Peter upon whom Jesus will lay the mantle of leadership of his Church.

How well we might reflect on this when we are confronted with the human failings within our Church community today. This gospel presents us with the mystery of a Church which is both a flawed human community

and a Spirit-empowered communion which continues the presence and ministry of "the Son of the living God".

All of us, as members of that Church, are imperfect human beings like Peter, often slow to understand, or lacking courage in our discipleship. Yet, we too are imbued with his Spirit, a Holy communion called Church, empowered to be his presence in our world. Do we understand the mystery and the glory that we carry within us and among us? ■

## A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS



This Sunday's gospel reading is a well-known passage, central to Matthew's account, in which Simon, on behalf of the Twelve, professes

his faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God"; and Jesus calls Simon "blessed" for this faith, recognising in him a special gift of the Father, and tells him, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."

Let us pause on this very point, on the fact that Jesus gives Simon this name, "Peter", which in Jesus' language is pronounced *Kefa*, a word which means "rock". In the Bible, this term, "rock", refers to God. Jesus gives it to Simon not because of his character or for his merits as a human, but for his genuine and steadfast faith, which comes to him from above.

Jesus feels great joy in his heart because, in Simon, he recognises the hand of the Father, the work of the Holy Spirit. He recognises that God the Father has given Simon "steadfast" faith on which he, Jesus, can build his Church, meaning his community, that

is, all of us. Jesus intends to give life to "his" Church, a people founded no longer on heritage, but on faith, which means on the relationship with him, a relationship of love and trust. The Church is built on our relationship with Jesus. And to begin his Church, Jesus needs to find solid faith, "steadfast" faith in his disciples. And it is this that he must verify at this point of the journey.

The Lord has in mind a picture of the structure, an image of the community like a building. This is why, when he hears Simon's candid profession of faith, he calls him a "rock", and declares his intention to build his Church upon this faith.

Brothers and sisters, what happened in a unique way in St Peter, also happens in every Christian who develops a sincere faith in Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Today's gospel passage also asks each of us, is your faith good? Each one answer in his or her heart. Is my faith good? How does the Lord find our hearts? A heart that is firm as a rock, or a heart like sand, that is doubtful, diffident, disbelieving? It will do us good to think about this

throughout the day today. If the Lord finds in our heart, I don't say a perfect, but sincere, genuine faith, then he also sees in us living stones with which to build his community. This community's foundation stone is Christ, the unique cornerstone. On his side, Peter is the rock, the visible foundation of the Church's unity; but every baptised person is called to offer Jesus his or her lowly but sincere faith, so that he may continue to build his Church, today, in every part of the world.

Even today, so many people think Jesus may be a great prophet, knowledgeable teacher, a model of justice ... And even today Jesus asks his disciples, that is, all of us, "Who do you say that I am?" What do we answer? Let us think about this. But above all, let us pray to God the Father, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary; let us pray that he grant us the grace to respond, with a sincere heart, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." This is a confession of faith, this is really "the Creed". Let us repeat it together three times, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ■

### TALKING POINTS

1. What is your image of St Peter, *Kefa*, "The Rock"?
2. All of us, in one way or another are like St Peter, at times impulsive, sometimes slow to understand, at times courageous and at other times denying our Lord. The Holy Spirit can transform our weakness so we can more fully participate as living stones in the Church. What does the Spirit need to transform in my life?

### PRAYER POINTS

**Pray for Each Other:** Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

**Response:** *Jesus Christ only Son of the living God, transform our hearts and minds as we place our trust in you.*

**Reflect:** Pope Francis says that this gospel passage asks each of us, is your faith good? How does the Lord find your heart? Is it a heart that is firm as a rock, or a heart like sand, that is doubtful, diffident, disbelieving?

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, transform our hearts. Holy Spirit, have your way in us. We offer you all that is human and unique so that you might fill it with your power and use it for your purpose, just as you did with St Peter. Amen.