

GOSPEL

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.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

This Sunday's Gospel takes us back to a key juncture along Jesus' journey with his disciples: the moment in which he wants to assess the extent of their faith in him. First, he wants to know what the people think of him; and the people think that Jesus is a prophet, which is true, but they do not grasp the centrality of his Person; they do not understand the centrality of his mission. Then he asks the disciples the question closest to his heart, that is, he asks them directly: "But who do you say that I am?". And with that 'but' Jesus firmly separates the Apostles from the multitudes, as if to say: but you, who are with me every day and know me personally, what more have you understood? The Master expects from his own a lofty response different from that of public opinion. And indeed, such an answer gushes forth from the heart of Simon, called Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". Simon Peter finds on his lips words greater than he, words that do not spring from

his natural faculties. Perhaps he did not attend elementary school, and [yet] he is capable of saying these words, stronger than he! But they are inspired by the Heavenly Father, who reveals Jesus' true identity to the first of the Twelve: he is the Messiah, the Son sent by God to save mankind. And from this answer, Jesus understands that, thanks to the faith given by the Father, there is a solid foundation upon which he can build his community, his Church. Thus, he says to Simon: You, Simon, "you are Peter" — that is, stone, rock — "and on this rock I will build my Church".

With us too, today, Jesus wants to continue building his Church, this house with solid foundations but where cracks are not lacking, and which is in constant need of repair. Always. The Church always needs to be reformed, repaired. We certainly do not feel like rocks, but only like small stones. However, no small stone is useless; indeed, in Jesus' hands the smallest stone becomes precious, because he picks it up, gazes at it with great tenderness, fashions it with his Spirit, and positions it in the right place that he had always had in mind and where it can be more useful to the whole structure. Each of us is a small stone, but in Jesus' hands participates in the building of the Church. And all of us, as small as we are, are rendered "living stones" because when Jesus takes his stone in hand, he makes it his own; he infuses it with life, full of life, full of life from the Holy Spirit, full of life from his love. And thus we have a place and a mission in the Church: she is a community of life, made up of very many stones, all different, which form a single edifice as a sign of fraternity and communion.

Moreover, today's Gospel reminds us that Jesus also wanted Peter as a visible centre of communion for his Church — he too, is not a great stone; he is a small stone, but taken up by Jesus, he becomes the centre of communion — in Peter and in those who would succeed him in the same responsibility of primacy, who since the beginning have been identified as the Bishops of Rome, the city where Peter and Paul bore witness in blood.

Let us entrust ourselves to Mary, Queen of the Apostles, Mother of the Church. She was in the Upper Room next to Peter when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles and spurred them to go out to proclaim to all that Jesus is Lord. Today may our Mother sustain us and accompany us through her intercession, so that we may fully realize that unity and that communion for which Christ and the Apostles prayed and gave their lives.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Who is Jesus to you?
- If someone were to ask Jesus who you are, what do you think he would say?
- Jesus gave Peter a specific mission for his life. What mission do you believe God has given you?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.