

## 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 BENEDICT XVI (EXCERPT)

*21 August 2011*

The Gospel we have just heard (cf. Mt 16:13-20) suggests two different ways of knowing Christ. The first is an impersonal knowledge, one based on current opinion. When Jesus asks: “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”. In other words, Christ is seen as yet another religious figure, like those who came before him. Then Jesus turns to the disciples and asks them: “But who do you say that I am?” Peter responds with what is the first confession of faith: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”. Faith is more than just empirical or historical facts; it is an ability to grasp the mystery of Christ’s person in all its depth.

Yet faith is not the result of human effort, of human reasoning, but rather a gift of God: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven”. Faith starts with God, who opens his heart to us and invites us to share in his own divine life. Faith does

not simply provide information about who Christ is; rather, it entails a personal relationship with Christ, a surrender of our whole person, with all our understanding, will and feelings, to God’s self-revelation. So Jesus’ question: “But who do you say that I am?”, is ultimately a challenge to the disciples to make a personal decision in his regard. Faith in Christ and discipleship are strictly interconnected.

And, since faith involves following the Master, it must become constantly stronger, deeper and more mature, to the extent that it leads to a closer and more intense relationship with Jesus. Peter and the other disciples also had to grow in this way, until their encounter with the Risen Lord opened their eyes to the fullness of faith.

Dear young people, today Christ is asking you the same question which he asked the Apostles: “Who do you say that I am?” Respond to him with generosity and courage, as befits young hearts like your own. Say to him: “Jesus, I know that you are the Son of God, who have given your life for me. I want to follow you faithfully and to be led by your word. You know me and you love me. I place my trust in you and I put my whole life into your hands. I want you to be the power that strengthens me and the joy which never leaves me”.

Jesus’ responds to Peter’s confession by speaking of the Church: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church”. What do these words mean? Jesus builds the Church on the rock of the faith of Peter, who confesses that Christ is God.

The Church, then, is not simply a human institution, like any other. Rather, she is closely joined to God. Christ himself speaks of her as “his” Church. Christ cannot be separated from the Church any more than the head can be separated from the body (cf. 1 Cor 12:12). The Church does not draw her life from herself, but from the Lord.

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** What is the current opinion of who Jesus is? In the world? Amongst your friends or family?



**Heart:** Who is Jesus to you?



**Hands:** In his homily, Pope Benedict leads us in a prayer of commitment to Jesus. How might we live lives that reflect this prayer?

## 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. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be’.