

Faith of Peter

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 24, 2014

READINGS

First Reading: IS 22:19-23

Responsorial Psalm: PS 138:1-2, 2-3, 6, 8

Second Reading: ROM 11:33-36

Gospel: MT 16:13-20

The more the gift of faith is given, the more the responsibilities, the more the blessings are poured. In our Gospel today, Jesus asked His disciples two questions: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" and "who do you say that I am?" These two questions are not questions about the identity of Jesus but about faith in the Messiah. This is specifically the gift of faith of Peter.

In the first question, Jesus solicited from His disciples about the people's idea of who is the Son of Man, which is a messianic title. They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

This answer expresses their understanding that the messiah is one who was dead and has come back to life in another form. But this was negated in the second question, now a personal one, directed to the disciples themselves: Jesus asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" This is a personal question because this is about Jesus Himself and this is also requiring a personal answer from the disciples. Simon's

reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" tells us that the Christ, the Messiah is not someone who was previously dead but one who is the Son of the living God.

If these two questions are questions about faith, then the people's answer is a rejection that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and Simon's answer is an expression of faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This faith does not come from himself nor from anybody but from the Father. Jesus said to Simon, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father." Simon is blessed because he was chosen to be the recipient of this great gift of faith on Jesus. With this great gift, a two great responsibilities were given to him. These responsibilities were sealed by changing his name to Peter. The greater the gift of faith of Peter, the greater are his responsibilities, the more blessings are poured upon him.

The changing of names in the Old Testament is a sealing of a covenant between God and His people through a mediator. I would like to mention two examples. The name of Abram was changed to Abraham, which means the father of all nations ([Gen. 17:1-5](#)). Jacob's name was changed to Israel after he persisted in his wrestling with God. "Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be named Jacob, but Israel, because you have contended with divine and human beings and have prevailed'" ([Gen. 32:25-30](#)).

Jesus changed the name of Simon to Peter, signifying that he is the rock on which Jesus will build His Church. The Church then is solidly founded on Peter's confession of faith which was in the first place a gift from the heavenly Father. This solid rock, therefore, is resting on The Stability of God's gratuitous gift. With this responsibility of being the solid foundation of the Church, Peter was also given the responsibility of continuing what Jesus came for, to forgive and to reconcile His people to God. Jesus told him, "I will give you the keys to the kingdom of

heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Even though for several times Peter showed his unfaithfulness to Jesus and denied Jesus three times during His passion, Jesus did not take back what He entrusted to Peter. Later, Peter got over his denial and professed his love for Jesus three times in the Gospel of John. With that love, Jesus renewed with him the mission of forgiveness and reconciliation.

These two great responsibilities were bestowed upon Peter as a covenant a relationship which is handed down through the ages in apostolic succession to the Popes until today, to Pope Francis, to the Bishops who also entrusted these to the priests during their ordination. However, these are also given to each and every Christian. What comes with the faith that was given to us as a gift is a responsibility, a mission of forgiveness and reconciliation to fulfill. We ask ourselves then, am I, first and foremost, doing my best to nourish the gift of faith of Peter? What I am doing to deepen my love for God? Have I become a living witness of God’s forgiveness and reconciliation? Let us pray with the prayers of Peter that we may also have his gift of faith.

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