

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matt 16:18

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Matt 16:13-20; L121A

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.

For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.

And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church,

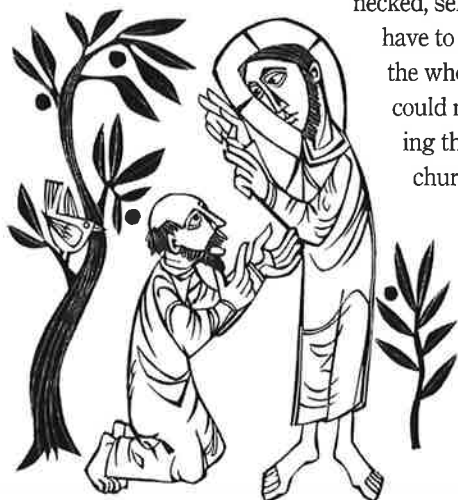
and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.

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."

Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.



Reflecting on the Gospel

It's such a seemingly simple question by Jesus: "But who do you say that I am?" The disciples still had so much to learn! So do we!

At first, in their response to Jesus' questions about who he is, the disciples mention only prophets. This ought to be no surprise. This is how their contemporaries would interpret this itinerant Rabbi. Throughout their history prophets had guided the Jewish people in the ways of God. Prophets had called them back to covenantal fidelity. Prophets had warned the Jewish people about impending punishment when they strayed from God through being stiff-

necked, self-reliant, and unfaithful. How much more did the disciples have to learn about who Jesus is! They could not be prepared for the wholly new that Jesus is—the new Adam, the new Moses. They could not be prepared for the wholly new covenant Jesus was offering through who he was. They could not be prepared for the new church, the new beloved people they themselves would become.

Indeed, Jesus is a prophet, but so much more: he is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Nothing short of a revelation by the "heavenly Father" could make this known to Peter. Nothing short of a revelation by the community of believers who acknowledge Jesus as "the Christ" and remain ever faithful to his saving mission could continue to make this known even to our day. The church is a fluidity of persons cemented together by the common bond of faithfully living the mystery of who Christ is. And who we are in him.

This gospel challenges us to keep before our eyes an understanding of church as the community of believers who constantly make present the risen Christ. Jesus makes a vital connection between his self-identity and the reality of the church. The church rests in Jesus, derives from who he is and his ministry, and is built up only by our own participation in the identity of Jesus. The church is the Body of Christ made visible in the community of believers who carry forward Jesus' saving mission. The church will prevail because Jesus' saving mission will prevail to the end of time when all will be gathered back to the Father.

Jesus is doing a wonderful thing in this gospel—he is telling us that by being church we participate in his identity (as children of God) and his saving mission. Nothing will prevail against this church so long as we keep ourselves turned toward Jesus and remember that our own identity as members of the Body of Christ is bound up in who Jesus is: "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Living the Paschal Mystery

Church isn't something we go to once a week, but it is an *identity* we share as members of the Body of Christ into which we were initiated at baptism. The disciples were "ordered" by Jesus to "tell no one that he was the Christ." No, we are not to *talk* about the Christ, we are to *be* the Presence of Christ living as he did. We build up this Body, the church, any time we reach out to another in need and respond as Christ would. We build up this Body, the church, every time we gather as a liturgical assembly to give God praise and thanks. We build up his Body, the church, any time we forgive, offer an encouraging word, show mercy and compassion. In all these and many other ways we are not only building up the church, we are also witnessing to our identity as church—as the Presence of the risen Christ made visible in and through us. Such an identity we share!

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: who do you say that I am, You are the Christ, build my church

To the point: In their response to Jesus' questions about who he is, the disciples mention only prophets. Indeed, Jesus is a prophet, but so much more: he is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Nothing short of a revelation by the "heavenly Father" could make this known to Peter. Nothing short of a revelation by the community of believers who acknowledge Jesus as "the Christ" and remain ever faithful to his saving mission could continue to make this known even to our day. The church is a fluidity of persons cemented together by the common bond of faithfully living the mystery of who Christ is.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: God removed "Shebna, master of the palace" from his position of authority because of his unfaithfulness. Then God placed his faithful servant Eliakim "like a peg in a sure spot" (first reading). Jesus confers the leadership of his church on Peter, setting him as a "rock" who would be faithful to the end.

to experience: When we hear "rock" in this gospel, little pebbles, sandstone, or limestone do not come to mind. Instead, what comes to mind is large boulders that are hard, permanent, and immovable. The church Jesus established, built upon Peter the "rock," remains hard at work bringing salvation to all, is permanent in the community of believers, and is immovable from the Gospel values Jesus revealed.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: In some versions of Psalm 138 the word "angels" is translated "other gods" since the Hebrew term used (*'elohim*) variously meant "God," "gods," or "godlike beings." These multiple meanings emerged as Israel slowly groped toward belief in one God. As their faith in the one God *'elohim* grew, they dethroned their notion of other gods and it is before these shadows of former power that the psalmist sings God's praises.

Like the Israelites' slow learning of who God was, Peter's discovery of the identity of Jesus (gospel) was a gradual process (see Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time). It was also a gift from God. And like with the Israelites, Peter's faith would become the foundation of the faith of many others. In singing this responsorial psalm, we testify to the durability of what has been given us through the Israelites and through Peter. Each of us gives thanks to God for being God. Each of us chooses to worship God. Each of us asks God never to forsake the "work" of leading us forward in faith, and of cementing us together as the community who faithfully reveals to the world the mystery of God and of Christ, the Son of God (gospel).

to psalmist preparation: The "work of [God's] hands" about which you sing in this Sunday's psalm is the gift of revelation, the gift of faith, the gift of the church founded upon the person Peter who grew in faith through experience and grace. How have you, through experience and grace, come to know God's revelation? How have you grown in your faith? How have you strengthened your bond with the community of believers, the church?

ASSEMBLY & FAITH-SHARING GROUPS

- I would answer Jesus' question about his identity by saying he is . . .
- My understanding of Jesus' identity clarifies and solidifies my understanding of the church in that . . .
- I experience Jesus continuing to build his church on Peter when . . . on me when . . .

PRESIDERS

I am most aware of continuing Jesus' saving mission when I . . . This challenges the way I minister in that . . .

DEACONS

My manner of serving builds up the church when . . . It can tear down the church when . . .

HOSPITALITY MINISTERS

Good hospitality cements the community of believers to . . .

MUSIC MINISTERS

My manner of doing music ministry reveals that I have come to know who Christ is by . . .

ALTAR MINISTERS

My serving others is a revelation of Jesus' identity to the community when . . .

LECTORS

My manner of proclamation helps the assembly encounter Jesus' saving work when I . . .

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

I remind the assembly through my ministry and daily living of its identity as the Body of Christ whenever I . . .