

Parish of the Divine Love

Homily Sunday August 23, 2020

Exodus 1:8-2:10; Psalm 124; Romans 12: 1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

Who do you say that I am? Who do you say that you are?

Have you ever asked yourself the question, “Who am I?” Did you come up with a good answer? Who do you say that you are when someone wants to get to know you? If someone asked you the question, “Who are you?” and you had only one minute to answer, what would you tell them? What would be the core truths about yourself that you would share? Or you could think of it this way: What would people write about you in your obituary if it were written today? But let’s go even a bit deeper, because obituaries and what you would tell another person about yourself, tend to leave out some very important details. They tend to leave out the bad stuff, don’t they? Usually our failures, our weaknesses, our dark side, and anything else of a negative nature are conspicuously missing from obituaries or from how we describe ourselves to others as we get to know them. When someone asks you to tell them a little bit about yourself, have you ever included details like, “Oh yeah, and I yell at my wife a lot, I really struggle with lying, and I have an anger issue?” Somehow, we don’t usually volunteer that kind of information, but instead we only share the good things about us and the positive sides of who we are. But I want you to pause this morning for a few moments and think how you would answer the question, “Who am I right now?” And as you answer that I want you to include both the good and the bad, because we all have some of both. Think of a few short phrases that would accurately describe the core truths of who you are right now, including what your passions and interests and strengths are, and what your weaknesses and struggles and challenges are. You can do it in your head if you’d like; but better yet, write it down on the back of your bulletin or make a new memo in your phone.

“But who do you say that I am?” Jesus asked. “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” Peter answered. There, he had said it. There was no going back. It was one thing to think it, an entirely different thing to own it by saying it out loud. Daring the name, the truth out loud moves us from an expression of faith that is

private and personal to one that is public and communal. Peter was the first of the disciples to name Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. And for his faith, Jesus named him Peter (rock) and gave him the keys of the kingdom. "On this rock, I will build my church" Jesus said. Even so, Peter's relationship with Jesus was never a smooth one. No sooner had he been praised, then Jesus was telling him to "Get behind me, Satan." This, in response, to Peter's protective reaction to Jesus' foretelling of his crucifixion.

Commitment always brings with it risk and vulnerability. Crossing over demands that we confront our fears of making a mistake (for we will always make mistakes on this life's journey). We will be tested. There will be trials. What we believe about God influences our ability to trust in the face of the unknown. To name Jesus as the Messiah demands surrender to God's call and claim upon our lives. As Marjorie Bankson in *The Soul of Our Leadership* notes, "Deep within us is planted the seed of new creation-dreams for a better world and wild hope that our dreams can be realized." But for this seed to grow, for our dreams to be realized, we need to step out in faith. Heeding God's call requires going public with the call we carry deep in our hearts. To risk invariably involves confronting the status quo, within ourselves and others. Only then can we articulate the truth within us and embody God's call in our life and living.

In this gospel Jesus revealed that Peter would be one of the spiritual foundation stones of the first church. This meant he would be a vital part of its growth and development. Peter's name meant "a rock" or "stone." Jesus then said of Himself, "...upon this rock I will build my Church" indicating that the Church would derive its existence from Him. He would be the rock upon which the Church was built. There would be many other lesser stones (people like Peter). These stones would be an important part of the Church. But Jesus Himself was the cornerstone on which the structure of the Church was to be built. Jesus then made two comments regarding this Church. First, He said that "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." This implied that the Church would have enemies fighting it but assured that the enemies would not overcome it. Second, and most important to our study, Jesus promised to give the keys to His Kingdom to the Church. In the natural world if you possess the keys to a building, it means you have authority there. The authority Jesus was speaking of in this passage is a spiritual authority. He gave the Church spiritual keys to the doors of His Kingdom. Jesus said "I" will

give them. The power and authority of the Church was to flow from Jesus. The use of the word "will" (future tense) meant that the keys had not yet been given at the time Jesus spoke. This power was released in Acts 2 when the Holy Ghost was given to believers: " But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8). The keys to the Kingdom were the power to bind and loose. To bind something means to put fetters or a bond on it. It is like closing and locking the door to a room. To loose something is to release or set it free. It is similar to opening the door to a room. The secret keys to kingdom things are position and disposition. Disposition is Kingdom Citizenship. Position is righteousness. Position and disposition: those are the keys. Get your citizenship in order and then stay in right relationship with the heavenly country and all these things will be added to you". The Church would have a position of authority. It would have the keys to God's Kingdom. It would be the instrument through which the spiritual doors to the Kingdom would be opened to the nations of the world.

When Jesus ordered His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah, surely, the disciples must have thought, "That is a strange command." In their minds, they must have thought, "If Jesus is the Messiah, what does He have to fear?" Little did they perceive at the time the mysterious ways of the Lord, that the Kingdom of God was not a physical Kingdom. When Peter was given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, what could possibly have gone through His mind? Did he expect the Kingdom of Heaven to descend on earth as many still do today? Did he see himself as ruling over the coming Kingdom? What about Jesus, where would He be? If Jesus gave the keys to Peter, surely, that must have meant that Jesus would not be around. At the time, the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven must have been intriguing to Peter. The keys of the kingdom are the principles, precepts, laws, and systems by which the kingdom functions. The keys must be learned and applied by the citizens to appropriate the benefits and privileges of the kingdom.

My brothers and sisters, there is something to learn from today's message. Sometimes in life, we do not understand why things happen the way they do. But surely, God who is everywhere, knows all, sees all and is in control of all situations. Every event, although mysterious at the time of its occurrence, serves

a spiritual purpose for our individual spiritual growth and for the benefit of the Church as a whole. Today, we may not understand why certain things are happening in our lives. The events may appear mysterious. But if we look 5 or 10 in our past, we may now perceive what appeared to be a mystery at that time. We may now be able to see how we have spiritually gained from our life experiences. Although the Heavenly Father was mysterious in His ways at the time, His Divine Will is now made known to us. The key to man's manifesting the kingdom of God here on earth is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Amen!