

21st Ordinary Sunday
August 23, 2020
“Faithful Leadership”

Is 22:19-23
Rom 11:33-36
Mt 16:13-20

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

At some time in our lives we all possess and must exercise authority. But how do we exercise that authority? How do we use it at work, in special groups, at home, or as a parent? Do we always try to determine what is best for those we help or serve?

Do we see ourselves as leaders who serve – no matter how high our authority or powerful our position? Are we patient with those for whom we are responsible? Do we help them learn from their mistakes – and ask the right questions? Do we listen to their suggestions, complaints, and even criticism of ourselves?

Our world and our nation are in such a state today because too many of those in authority have not served the common good and been just and fair. They have not listened to what their constituents have had to say for far too long. Moreover, all too few of them have ever acknowledged God’s ultimate authority or discerned what God wants them to accomplish in the role or position they have.

It was just such a leader that God condemned through Isaiah in today’s Old Testament scripture passage. The true role of any prophet is to call our attention to what is wrong and what must be changed. But a prophet can also be a visionary and point to a future that will unfold if the right changes are made. In this case, Shebna, a political leader for the king, would be dishonored and dismissed. Eliakim would take his place. And Eliakim would make decisions based upon what was right and just under the direction of the Lord God.

However, this prophecy also looks forward to the future. It speaks of someone to come who will have Godly power. He will open and close for God – what no one else can presume to do. And his authority and work will be irrevocable and secure! Of course, these words of Isaiah found expression and fulfillment in Jesus – the Son of God and the Son of Man!

Today in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man. This was an Old Testament term which originally meant a human son of Adam. But, gradually, it came to mean much more. It came to mean someone who would fulfill God's plan and work for the human race – It meant someone with Messianic qualities! And this is exactly what was revealed to Peter in the passage for today!

When questioned who the Son of Man would eventually be, the disciples replied: "John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets." They did not mention Jesus himself. But Peter saw the true answer because he had a revelation from God! Peter had listened to the Holy Spirit! Consequently, Peter realized that Jesus was the Son of Man. Jesus was the one prophesied and long-awaited. Jesus was the Messiah!

This revelation from God to Peter led Jesus to appoint him as the foundation and leader for the community of disciples that would become the Church. Moreover, Peter and the Church would be able to do the binding and the loosing of what was best for that Church. They would exercise the authentic leadership that would best serve the People of God in the future. They would be able to fulfill their leadership role provided that they, too, listened to the voice of God. And that voice would come through the Holy Spirit. It would be spoken at the right time to popes, bishops, and those laity who truly sought to do the will of God!

Brothers and Sisters, the Church has come a long way in 2000 years. It has survived because there have always been people faithful to God and open to the Spirit of God in the pews as well as behind the altar! There have been mistakes because of human sinfulness – there have been those who broke away – There have been, even now, strident voices insisting that the teaching of Jesus is out of date – that the Church is too stringent and unbending!

Nevertheless, with God's help, authentic leadership and faithful listening and openness to God, we will continue into the future. Because God never abandons the Church, however large ... or small!

So, let us pray, today, that each of us will always be a part of those who are always faithful!

Amen.

August 23, 2020

Msgr. Russell G. Terra