

Homily. 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year A. 22/23 August 2020.

I think it's important to start by addressing the elephant in the room with this gospel reading. No, Jesus wasn't referring to the Papacy, nor to what we know as the sacrament of Penance, sometimes called confession, when He spoke to His disciples about the power He gave them to bind or to loose from rules and laws, sins and debts. We can be confident about this because, quite simply, there wasn't any Papacy or sacrament of Penance when Jesus spoke. In fact, there wouldn't be either of these things for decades, even centuries to come because there was no such thing as the Church in the way that we've come to understand that word.

What Jesus said to Peter, and through him to the other disciples, was that His new community of believers which over many years would evolve into the Church was built upon the rock of their profession of faith. His power to bind up or to set people free was given to them as long as they confessed their faith in Him as the Chosen Son of the living God.

This binding and loosing power and responsibility is given to each of us. It's you and I who choose to forgive and free or to judge and bind people to their past failures and sins. Decades, even centuries would elapse before these words understandably became associated with the power of the Papacy and the sacrament of Penance. Nevertheless, to this day, by Christ's gift, it is first of all within our power to choose to bind or to loose others, to hold them to account or to mercifully forgive and set them free.

Now we have to ask ourselves from where comes this awesome power with its commensurate responsibility? Matthew's gospel tells us the

answer. It comes to us as a grace from God in the exact same way that it came to Peter. It comes to us from our daily encounter with Jesus, from listening to Him as He asks us over and over again the great question of our faith; But you, who do you say I am? It's not human reasoning alone or another source emerging from our own flesh and blood that can rightly answer this question. Only God, by revealing this truth within our hearts and souls, our inmost self, can do that for us. If we're faithful, patient and persistent in our search, there deep within us God gently leads us to grasp that Jesus truly is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

St. Peter, by a Godly gift, came to this insight before the other disciples. Eventually, they, too, awoke to the truth and reality of God's presence and action in the man they called their Lord. St. Paul, after his conversion, spent all of his adult Christian life answering and living out the meaning of this question. Finally, he could say to us as he did in the 2nd reading that all exists comes from Him; all is by Him and all is for Him. To Him be praise and glory for ever, adding his Amen, his yes I believe to this.

The same Lord asks you and me who it is that we say He is? Sticking with this question each day brings us ever deeper into the light. It is an answer, a light of our faith opening us up to God's life and plan; a life of forgiveness and kindness and a plan to save everything and everyone, setting all people and things free in Christ's merciful love.