

Spirituality



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by Thomas Gumbleton

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If we listen carefully and deeply to this Gospel, I think we find it very challenging because as commentaries tell us about this scripture, Peter is seen here as a type, a model for every disciple. If Jesus were standing in front of us and were to say, "Who do you say I am?" If we follow the model of Peter, we would cry out immediately, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Jesus was amazed that Peter could say this even though Jesus had been teaching them, but he had never been fully revealed as God.

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 22:19-23

Psalms 138:1-2, 2-3, 6, 8

Romans 11:33-36

Matthew 16:13-20

[Full text of the readings](#)

He tells Peter, "It's only because God, my Father in heaven, has revealed this to you, that you are able to say that." Then Jesus, as we heard, goes on to say (because at this point he's changing his name), "You are no longer Simon; you are Peter, (which as we know, is a word in the language of Jesus for rock) and on this rock I will build my church." So it's the faith of Peter upon which Jesus is building his community of disciples.

If that faith of Peter and this whole incident is what they call a "type" or a "model," then Jesus is asking every one of us to make the same proclamation, to say, "Yes, Jesus, you are the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of the living God." It may seem easy enough to say those words, but if we think about the implications, we begin to see the challenge. If Jesus is the Son of God, then all of his teachings, even the hard sayings that some of the disciples described his teachings as being — hard sayings,

all of those teachings come to us from God.

Think of the young man who ran up to Jesus and said, "What do I have to do to gain the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus said, "Keep the commandments." The young man said, "I've done that; I'm faithful to the commandments." Then, "If you want to be my disciple, go sell what you have, give to the poor, and follow me." Do you remember what happened? The young man went away (this is in Luke's Gospel). Luke said he was very sad because he had many riches. He wasn't ready to follow Jesus who demands that we share what we have, not hold on to everything for ourselves.

That's a hard teaching; there's no question about it. Or the hard teachings about when I was hungry you gave me [something] to eat. When I was thirsty you gave me a drink. When I was naked you clothed me. When I was homeless you took me in. Those are hard teachings and sometimes we struggle against them. We're still in a dispute in our country about building a wall to keep out people who are fleeing poverty and violence. It's a hard teaching of Jesus. When I was naked you clothed me. When I was homeless you took me in.

He made no exceptions. Again, if we say it about Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of the Living God," this is what God is asking of us. He's asking us to try to deepen our faith so that it becomes not just something theoretical, not just something that is so many words that we proclaim as we recite a creed, but that is something that leads us to action, to follow Jesus who is the Son of God. Jesus says he's building his church on Simon who is now Peter, the rock.

As I said before, that's a type. Every one of us is called to the same faith, to be that rock of faith, which makes us ready to follow Jesus. As I was reflecting on these scriptures for today, I could not help but put it into my experience of being privileged to celebrate liturgy with you over the past few years. As we went through the loss of our pastor, Father Pete, it's very clear to me that you are a community of believing people. You really are a rock on which the church of Jesus, a community of disciples can be built.

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I know that you're struggling and hoping and praying that even though Father Pete is gone, the authorities of the archdiocese will allow this community to continue. That's certainly my prayer. I experience this as a community of people who are ready to say to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, and we want to follow you and your ways. We fail sometimes, of course, but we will always try our best to follow Jesus." This is a community that really is that rock of faith that Jesus said Peter was. You are people who believe and who want to follow Jesus.

It's my prayer that I can continue to be with you and learn from you and be strengthened by your faith as you strengthen one another's faith. That's what a community of disciples does. I hope that we all listen deeply to today's Gospel. Here, Jesus is asking the question and that we are willing to say with as much conviction as possible, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Because you are God, teach to us God's wisdom. We are determined to follow you as you bring the reign of God into existence in our world."

[Homily given Aug. 26 at St. Philomena Parish in Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]