

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 23 August 2020

Scriptures: Isaiah 22:19-23; Romans 11:33-36; Matt. 16:13-20

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the Gospel passage, when Jesus asked: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" he started innocently enough by having the disciples report on what they were hearing about him. Their sources were what they picked up from synagogue chatter and street gossip, plus whatever the women may have heard around town. Some said John the Baptist, as if he had returned from the dead. Others added the popular opinions that identified him with Elijah or another one of the prophets.

Then, Jesus quickly put them on the spot. He asked: "But who do you say that I am?" They wondered what to say. Peter eventually spoke up: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God".

Peter's statement in the name of the other apostles effectively declared that their relationship with Jesus was the very commitment that defined their lives.

When Jesus responded, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you", he acknowledged that he saw God's grace at work in Peter. Building on God's affirmation of him at his baptism, this interaction assured Jesus not only that he was God's beloved, but that his mission would find a home and a future among his disciples. While their faith was not yet resilient enough to withstand the storms to come and still needed much clarification, it was enough to build on. In fact, Jesus proclaimed that it was strong enough that the netherworld could not overcome it.

When Jesus gave Peter the "power of the keys", he was delegitimizing the religious elite who claimed the exclusive right to interpret the Mosaic Law. The disciples had seen Jesus "loosen" the laws of Sabbath and purity; now he was sharing that

responsibility with them. In giving Peter and his church the keys to the kingdom of heaven, Jesus gave them the responsibility to open doors as he had done throughout his ministry. While the official religious authorities were often quick to decide who was in and who was out, Jesus excluded no one but rather mourned the plight of those who excluded themselves by rejecting the gifts he offered.

When we read this story as a dialogue about apostolic dedication, we begin to comprehend what it means for the church—for each one of us—today.

When we Christians stand with St. Peter and profess: “You are the Christ, the son of the living God”, we are making a commitment, and we are receiving a vocation. We are consecrating ourselves to God our creator, rejecting the idols of fame and fortune, and the idol of power that marginalizes the poor, including refugees and immigrants.

We are joining with Jesus, the disciples, and the prophets in the mission to use every possible means to bring about the Kingdom of God, that is, to bring about a world of justice, equality, freedom, and peace, so that all peoples can access the goods of creation.

Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am”, may make us uncomfortable. It also turns the tables and asks us: “Who do you say you are?”