

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time - Reflection

Isaiah 22:19-23; Psalm 138; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 16:13-20

Much of life right now seems like shifting sand - so many uncertainties. Too many questions and not enough honest answers. So many unknowns and so much is unpredictable.

Shouldn't faith help us in moments and seasons like this? Shouldn't the Church offer a solid foundation and certain hope? YES! However, sometimes the storms of life shake our faith and the darkness around us hinders our ability to see clearly. It is especially difficult when we are unable to gather freely as a family of God and receive the sacraments. Nevertheless, faith does matter and God's Word does point us to our sure and certain hope, Jesus Christ.

Among all the various and many questions we are asking: When will this virus end? Will I test positive? Do you have a mask? Will they find a vaccine or cure? Who will win the election? Will our votes count? Will there be an honest election? How can we work for racial equality? Will I have a job? Will the economy collapse? Will the schools open? Will there be cruise ships next season? On a lighter note, will the rain ever stop? There is one question we may not be asking, but should. It is the very question Jesus asked his disciples.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus asks the disciples two related questions, "Who do people say that I am?" and "Who do you say that I am?" While it is interesting to note the various answers the disciples and others give to the first questions, what is of utmost significance is not who others think Jesus is, but who you think Jesus is. "Who do you say I am?!"

This question is vital and central to our faith and peace for our journey. "Who do you say that I am?" While making many mistakes in his journey of faith including denying Jesus three times in Jesus' time of need, Peter got this answer right on

saying, "You are the Christ, the son of the Living God." As a friend of mine is known to say, "Christ is not Jesus' last name, "Christ" is a statement about Jesus' identity." The word "Christ" means "anointed." Jesus is the anointed one of God, the long awaited Messiah, the Savior and redeemer of the world.

If this is true, which I believe with all my heart and the Church clearly teaches that Jesus is the Christ, then Jesus is the key to finding peace and a solid foundation in uncertain times. Jesus is the ultimate answer to all our questions.

The same God who revealed to Peter the truth of Jesus is the very God we worship and the God who sustains us and offers us life, forgiveness, mercy, and hope in our time of need. Our God offers us solid footing amidst the shifting sands of our time.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. As vital as Peter's roll is in the Church and his successors - our Popes, there is some question who or what the rock is that Jesus is referring to. Is Peter the rock on which Jesus will build his Church or is Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ the rock? Hear again the Gospel:

"He (Jesus) said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter said in reply,

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus said to him in reply,

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.

For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.

And so I say to you, you are Peter,

and upon this rock I will build my church,

and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it."

There is a play on words given that the name Peter means rock. In addition, after the resurrection, Peter's preaching, witness and leadership clearly provided solid ground for the church to grow. Yet, according to many scholars, including St. Augustine, "This rock" refers to either Peter's statement of faith that Jesus is the Christ or the rock is Jesus himself. Most likely, it is both. Jesus is our rock and our faith in Jesus as Lord sets us on solid ground.

While Jesus goes on to give Peter the "Keys to the Kingdom" which is a powerful sign of Peter's leadership and authority in the Church, our ultimate rock and

foundation is Jesus. The ultimate rock and foundation of the Church is our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Fr. Jude Siciliano, OP. writes, "It is not just a question about Jesus, is it? It's also about us: Who Am I? What do I believe? On what rock have I chosen to stand? Peter did not always get it right. The rock Jesus will build his church on isn't Peter, it is his faith expressed in his testimony. Faith is the foundation of the Church. (Another interpretation has it that when Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church," he was referring to himself. Jesus is the stone rejected by the builders that has become the cornerstone.)" Jesus' question: "Who do you say that I am?" will define who I am; how I live; what I do; whom I become in my life."

While so many questions are being asked in this time, may we seek to answer this one essential questions. Who do you say that Jesus is?

While we seek to answer this question, I appreciate the church also bringing before us Paul's confession of the wonder, mystery and majesty of God from Romans 11:

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!
*For who has known the mind of the Lord
or who has been his counselor?
Or who has given the Lord anything
that he may be repaid?*
For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be glory forever. Amen."

In the shifting sands of our time, we are encouraged to stand on Christ and the truth that He is the Savior of the world and Cornerstone of all God is building. To stand on the rock of Christ is to give God glory!

There is so much we do not understand and so many questions we have. Yet, we are called to trust God in this time. We are encouraged to reaffirm where we stand. May we intentionally place our footing and our very lives on the solid rock, Jesus Christ.

Jesus goes on to say, "Upon this rock I will build my church (*ekklesia*)."
The Greek word for "Church" is *ekklesia*, it literally means "Called out gathering" or "Called

out community.” We are the church, the “Called out people of God.” Called out of the shifting sands of the world and onto the solid rock of Christ. Called out to be signs of hope to the world. Called out to build our lives on the Rock. Called out of the chaos of our time to offer others sure footing and solid ground.

May our lives reflect this truth. As we stand on the solid rock of Christ, may our “Called out” lives invite others to ask questions for which Jesus Christ is the answer.

I am reminded of Jesus’ concluding words in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. If we hear God’s words and act on them, “we will be like a wise person who built his house upon the rock. Even though the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me,

Also, please join me in welcoming our newly baptized: Steve Tupper and Thomas Tupper (Father and Son).

And our newly confirmed members of the Church, “The Called Out”: Tracy and Eric Forst and Steve and Thomas Tupper.

May God bless them and encourage them in their journeys of faith and may we help one another stand on the solid rock of Jesus Christ.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve