

August 27, 2017

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

There are a lot of different positions regarding aspects of the Christian faith, and many different ways of expressing it - that can get confusing. Our readings today bring up a question: What does it mean to be firm and solid in the faith? Or better yet: how can we be the rock that Jesus uses to build the Church? Jesus tells Peter that he is the rock upon which he will build his Church. But just like in any physical church building there is not just one rock - one rock is not enough to build a church. A church building made of many stones - or many bricks as in the case of our church buildings - a physical church building is a symbol of the collection of living stones that make up the whole of God's Church. In the letter to the Ephesians we read: *So then you are ... fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together ... in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.* We must work individually to become firm stone, and work together to build a dwelling place for the Spirit - but how?

We first we have to work to be firm stone ourselves. There was this documentary I saw a long time ago about the construction of a great cathedral church in Europe. The movie was done as a fictional story of the construction of the cathedral, and through the telling of the story they gave information about the building process. In one scene there is a collapse of part of the cathedral where some of the workers are killed. The reason - the stone being used was not of a firm quality and it broke under the weight and the wall came falling down. It is not just being a stone in the wall. In order for the wall to be a firm one we have to work to be firm stone. So how do we do this? First we have to be properly informed of the faith of the Church if we are to be firm stones in the walls of the Church. The more we can come to church and be fed by the word, the more we can study and learn about the faith the firmer we become. You will see in the my column in bulletin that we are working to provide more opportunities for this. I was speaking with someone the other day who had a mix of beliefs that were confusing her - her faith was not firm. She had been reading the Bible, seeing what she could come up with on her own, and listening to various persons on TV on faith topics. She left this all confused. Not because she was not sincere in trying - but God is just so vast and mysterious and the possibilities for misunderstanding the meaning of scripture or putting our own personal opinions in it is too great.

We heard in the second reading: *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?* To be firm stone we must hold to a firm and authentic faith and this requires some help ... more on that in a minute.

The second thing that we need to build a strong church is a good fit between stones and good mortar. Good stones must be held together by good mortar and fit together well to make a strong wall. The unity that Christ calls us to as a church involves us working to fit together, to smooth the rough places that keep the stones from fitting tightly together, and to be willing to join together with the mortar that is our common practice of worship and community. True faith makes firm stone, willingness to be smoothed and make some minor alterations helps to makes a good fit, the mortar of communal life and our worship helps to bind the stones together.

The third thing needed is a good blueprint. If you don't have that the whole thing is liable to fall over. God has laid out a blueprint, but, as we said God is so vast and mysterious that it is hard to understand. Just like you need a professional builder to interpret and follow the blueprints when building a physical structure, so also we need someone to interpret God's plans. God has always known this, so God has been continuously placing guides for us. In the first reading we heard God set up Eliakim as a guide: *I will place the key of the House of David on Eliakim's shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut when he shuts, no one shall open. I will fix him like a peg in a sure spot.* We hear in the Gospel that Jesus appoints Peter as rock. The Apostles form the foundation, and Jesus the capstone of the structure. We as Catholics believe that the role of Peter and his successors (the popes) - and the teaching office of the Church - is to be that builder that helps to interpret the blueprints. In the Gospel story, Jesus asks a question about true faith. Many contradictory answers are given. Peter is the one who speaks the true faith, and like Eliakim, is appointed by Jesus to a special role of leadership. It is to the Church and her teachings that we go when there are difference of opinion, Jesus knew that with the mysteriousness of God and God's blueprint, we would need a central place to test the voice of the Spirit. We need someone who can rightly read such a complex blueprint.

The unity that comes from firm stones who work to fit together under the true reading of the blueprint that God has provided makes a strong Church. This Church supports us as we work to bring the light of Christ to the world, it shelters us from the storms of life, and it is the palace to encounter God joined together to our fellow stones in the walls of God's Church.