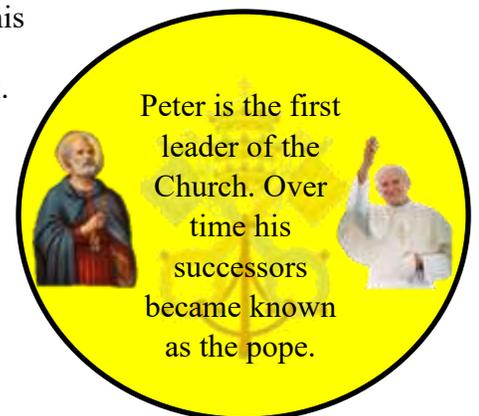


# Recognizing the Christ (Matthew 16-18)

- Jesus vs. the Pharisees and Sadducees
  - ◇ The leaders claim to read the heavens in order to predict the weather but they remain obstinately blind in spiritual matters.
  - ◇ Jesus refuses to perform a sign at their demand. Jesus tells them the only sign they will receive is the resurrection. If that doesn't change their mind, nothing will.
  - ◇ The leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees refers to their influence. Like the yeast it is not always visible but has an effect.
  - ◇ It is the religious leaders of the Jews who are actually a stumbling block to their people entering the kingdom of heaven.
- You are Peter
  - ◇ Caesarea Philippi
    - \* Herod Philipp built a temple to the Emperor (Caesar) Tiberius here.
    - \* Thus it bears the name of the two other rulers: Caesar and Philip.
    - \* Jesus manifests his glory here twice: once with the confession of Peter and again at the transfiguration (probably).
    - \* This area was also known for its pagan temples, lewd sexual conduct (bestiality) and for a cave that was believed to be the entrance to Hades or the underworld.
    - \* There are many niches carved into the rock that are evidence of idol worship.
    - \* The Greek God Pan was worshipped here in a special way. Pan is the God of nature. Jesus has already shown himself as master of nature by calming the storm.
    - \* Overall, Caesarea Philippi seemed like Satan's turf. Jesus chooses a place where Satan seems to reign to manifest himself at the very entrance to hell.
  - ◇ Who do people say that I am?
    - \* There were many beliefs circulating about who Jesus was as there were differing views on John the Baptist.
    - \* The answers are expected: they think he's a prophet. If Jesus is just another in a long line of prophets, he doesn't mean much. Jesus is not one among many. He is the ONE.
  - ◇ But who do you say I am?
    - \* The apostles had followed him. They had heard him speak with authority, they have heard his claims of divinity, they had seen him work miracles, feed thousands and calm the very elements of nature. Would their perspective be different by what they had seen?
    - \* Peter makes his confession that Jesus is the ONE. He is the Son of the living God.
  - ◇ You are Peter (Peter up)
    - \* Jesus renames Simon (his given name). What Peter has confessed, faith in Christ, is the foundation of the Church. Everything that we believe is built upon the ground that Jesus is the Son of God.
    - \* Peter receives this knowledge as a special grace from the Father.
    - \* Jesus gives Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven which indicates his authority as the steward of the kingdom of which Jesus is the king.
    - \* Jesus also establishes the Church and endows it with authority as well. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. If we look at hell as the place of lie, we see the Church then as the advocate of the truth.
    - \* Jesus also bestows upon Peter a binding and loosing authority.
  - ◇ Peter down
    - \* Jesus foretells his death and Peter forbids this from happening.
    - \* Although Peter has made his declaration of faith in Jesus, he still has not grasped the role Jesus has come to fulfill.



- ◇ “Get behind me, Satan.” Satan is the tempter and Peter is, in a way, tempting Jesus again. Peter should not be another voice tempting Jesus to renounce his mission and not go to the cross.
- ◇ Jesus then raises the bar with all the apostles telling them that if they wished to be his disciples that each of them must take up their own cross and follow him.
- ◇ As Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for the sins of men, so too must all who seek to follow Christ must be willing to work on the virtue of self-denial.



The Transfiguration is similar to God revealing himself to Moses: 1. on the seventh day; 2. on a mountain; 3. have three companions; 4. the faces of Moses and Jesus shine; 5. God is present; 6. God speaks with a heavenly voice.

- The Transfiguration

- ◇ In line with Biblical theophany, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain to reveal his glory.
- ◇ This is probably Mount Hermon in Caesarea Philippi.
- ◇ Christ shines in his full divinity.
- ◇ Moses and Elijah appear with Christ. These two figures represent the Law and the Prophets. Jesus appearing at the center shows that both the commandments and promises center upon him.
- ◇ Peter longs to prolong the experience by setting up tents.
- ◇ After hearing God’s voice Peter, James and John fall on their faces as the posture of those overwhelmed by God’s presence.
- ◇ As they come down the three question Jesus as to why Elijah must come and Jesus responds that Elijah had already come. The scribes were correct but failed to recognize John the Baptist coming in the spirit of Elijah.

- The Temple Tax

- ◇ Every male over the age of 20 had to pay a tax for the Temple. This was the “two drachma tax”. A shekel was worth four drachmas or two of the “two drachma” tax.
- ◇ The tax collectors approach Peter because they see him as the spokesman for the apostles.
- ◇ “The sons are free.” Jesus is the Son of God and thus does not owe the Temple tax. Peter shares in Jesus’ sonship as an adopted son of the Father. However, Jesus still has them pay the tax anyway.
- ◇ The coin that Peter will find in the mouth of the fish will cover the cost of the Temple tax for both Jesus and Peter. This illustrates the spiritual connection between the King and his steward.

- Living as a disciple

- ◇ The greatness of life in the Church is underscored by humility, service and mercy.
- ◇ Being like children is not just about a simplicity of faith but about a recognition of a total reliance on God.
- ◇ Jesus emphasizes the need for his disciples to live uprightly and provide a good model to follow.

- ◇ He highlights this with his discussion of the millstone. The millstone was obviously used in milling and it required the strength of donkeys to turn it. By stating that it be better to die by drowning due to being tethered to a millstone was Jesus' way of underlining that we must be aware of the danger that sin poses.
- ◇ Jesus then reminds his followers that he has come to call us to repentance. We are all wayward sheep that are in need of the shepherd who seeks us out and leads us back to safety.
- Fraternal correction
  - ◇ We are called to lead others away from sin out of a real love for them. We can shun this responsibility by a counterfeit form of love but sin must be dealt with; it must be uprooted from our lives.
  - ◇ We are to confront our brothers and sisters about the reality of sin and, if necessary, be persistent and seek the help of others.
  - ◇ The final authority lies with the Church because of its divine origin from whence she receives her authority.
  - ◇ Jesus uses "binding and loosing" again but this time he gives it to the entire apostolic college. This is in line with Church teaching in which the apostles (later bishops) in union with Peter (the pope) have the ability to teach infallibly.
  - ◇ Peter responds with the question that he thinks to be just. He asks if he has to forgive even seven times.
  - ◇ Jesus responds with seventy-seven times which is meant to mean infinite forgiveness.
  - ◇ The parable of the unmerciful servant is about mercy and hypocrisy. If we are to seek mercy and forgiveness from God, we must be willing to give mercy. We all sin which places us in a far greater debt to God than any we can incur from another. Mercy is the Christian's mission statement.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTERS 16-18

Do you find anything interesting in the demand for a sign from the Pharisees and Sadducees?

Why is the location of Caesarea Philippi of note for both Peter's declaration and the Transfiguration?

Why is Peter's answer to "who do you say that I am" so different than the others?

Why are the figures of Moses and Elijah present at the Transfiguration? What do they represent?

What makes one great in the kingdom Jesus is establishing?

Do we take the Christian task of fraternal correction as seriously as we ought to?