

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (A-2020)
St. Patrick - Milford

Today's gospel story is a pinnacle in St Matthew's gospel ... Peter's confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi. Some commentators have said that this story is like the backbone and hinge of the entire gospel, a high point towards which all the preceding life and ministry of Jesus leads, and from which his life moves to its inevitable conclusion in the journey to Jerusalem and his eventual suffering and death.

As Jesus says in the story, it is only by the grace of God, that (for one blinding moment) Peter "gets it right." He has the crucial insight into "who" this Jesus of Nazareth really is: the long-awaited Jewish Messiah and the Son of the Living God. Peter experiences a crowning moment in his life. He "gets it right"—not something of which poor Peter is always accused.

But there is a problem here. The way the liturgy breaks up Bible passages for some Sunday readings is such that, often enough, we don't get the whole story. For example, in Matthew's gospel, right after this scene-stealing demonstration by Peter ... right after he really "gets it right" for a change ... he "gets it terribly wrong" in the very next scene. It's where Jesus has to turned on him when Peter is tempting him to by-pass his upcoming passion and death and take the easy way out ... calling Peter a "Satan". Poor Peter "gets it terribly wrong" in the very next moment. Why? Peter doesn't think that Jesus (being "the Christ, the Son of the living God") should have to endure what Jesus is predicting ... death ... Peter thinks that being the Son of the living God should cost anything.

Peter thought that being the Messiah and Son of God should be cool, that it meant nothing would go wrong, that there was no need to keep journeying to Jerusalem—especially given the dangers lurking there. Well, he learned the hard way. He is called Satan by Jesus; because only the Evil One would ever suggest that faith won't have to be translated into sometimes painful action.

There's a lesson here for all of us on a spiritual journey. Every good spiritual insight, every gift from above ... our very faith has to be translated into action. You have to know what to do with faith the insight. And that is often our weak spot.

St. Paul learned this lesson the hard way too. That's the only reason he can be so enthusiastic about how "inscrutable are his God's judgments" and "how unsearchable are God's ways." And that's why Paul can ask such seemingly innocent questions, like: "*For who has known the mind of the Lord?*" "*Who has been the Lord's counselor?*" He knows the answer is pretty simple ... no one really "knows" God that way. God lives and breathes in unspeakable mystery ... God always has and God always will. And, as often as we might "get it right" in talking about the experience, we will also "get it wrong."

Some theologians have suggested that this is the real reason Matthew ends the experience with Jesus urging his disciples not to tell anyone about it. Jesus was probably suggesting that it's better to remain a bit cautious until one finds out what the faithful insight might mean in the real world ... and what my faithful insight may be asking me to do!

Let us realize that when Jesus asks us: "Who do you say that I am?" our faithful insight can help us grow in understanding of who we are called to be. The more we seek to know God more fully ... the more we enter into deeper relationship, the more clearly we come to know ourselves.