

From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyorembor

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A – August 23, 2020

Primacy of Peter

We come to the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time. Our Gospel passage today features that rich conversation between Jesus and Simon Peter which took place in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

This is the place where Jesus asked his disciples the fundamental question: *“Who do People say that the Son of Man is?”* He gets this predictable answer: some say John the Baptist, other say Elijah, others Jeremiah or some say you are one of the prophets. It would be like asking for a popular opinion poll today. You would get some diverse range of answers.

But then here is what He goes on to do. He turns to His immediate circle and He asks the same question, *“Who do you say the Son of Man is?”* They fall silent. Simon Peter speaks *“You are the Christ the Son of the living God.”* The people didn’t have the right answer nor did his inner circle. Only Simon peter had the right answer: *“You are the Christ; the Son of the Living God”* So, in the wake of Simon Peter’s confession Jesus says something that is of extraordinary importance to us. *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but my heavenly father, you are Peter and upon the rock of this confession I will build my church.”* Peter did not get his insight from his own reflection, not from talking to people. It came not from flesh and blood but from Heaven, from God Himself. What is important here is that it is upon this mystical revelation on which the church is founded.

What I intend to accomplish in my homily today is to reflect on what we mean when we say *The Church*. Again, I am not talking about the building. I am talking about this

community of believers that Jesus Himself founded on the confession of Peter which, by extension, includes all of us the Baptized. Everyone listening to me. The term *Church* comes from the Greek word EKKLESIA. It means “those who have been called out from.” The church is the community of those who have been called out from. There are three things that we can derive from this understanding of *Church*. If there is Ecclesia, then there has to be:

- someone who is calling
- something out of which people are called
- something new into which they are called

To understand these three things distinctions is to understand a lot about who we are as *The Church* that Jesus founded upon the confession of Peter. Our identity is wrapped in our understanding of these categories.

- First - Who is calling? Christ Himself is the one who has called us into friendship with Him. Talking about the calling of God always brings back memories of the times when I administer the sacrament of Baptism. Parents, Grandparents, God parents bring the baby into church. He/she has no idea what is going on. Sometimes they sleep/cry their way through the baptism ceremony. A sign of the cross is traced on their forehead. They have, we have been claimed for Christ. We receive the mark of Christ on our bodies; Christ brands us members of the Church.
- Second - There must be **something out of which** we have been called. We have been called out of darkness, everything that is opposed to Christ. Called out of darkness into His wonderful light. A candle is presented to us. We carry that same candlelight on Easter vigil every year as we renew those Baptismal promises. “*You*

- *have been called to proclaim the praises of him who called you out of Darkness into his own wonderful light.” 1 Peter 2:9*
- Third - There has to be **something New into which** we have been called. We are called to be partakers of the divine life that God’s *Church* offers. Participate in the sacraments, observe the ten commandments, chose the ways of love, forgiveness and holiness. St Paul tells us “*Anyone who is in Christ Jesus is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.*” As *The Church* we are called into New Life with God.

Here is an important component and I will close with this. Jesus also tells Simon Peter: “*I will build my church and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against you.*” **Our Church is a Fighting Church.** We are the Ecclesia Militant. We are fighting evil and all its ramifications. We are fighting everything that is opposed to God: sin, hate, division, betrayal, lying, sexual immorality. Ecclesia Militant! We fight these vices using spiritual weapons of prayer. I would like to invite everyone to pray the St. Michael Prayer everyday to defeat the work of Satan.

Bishop Robert Barron Homily for the 21st Sunday was very helpful.