

**August 4, 2005**  
**Memorial of Saint John Vianney, priest**

Nm 20:1-13

The whole congregation of the children of Israel arrived in the desert of Zin in the first month, and the people settled at Kadesh. It was here that Miriam died, and here that she was buried.

As the community had no water, they held a council against Moses and Aaron. The people contended with Moses, exclaiming, "Would that we too had perished with our kinsmen in the LORD's presence!

Why have you brought the LORD's assembly into this desert where we and our livestock are dying? Why did you lead us out of Egypt, only to bring us to this wretched place which has neither grain nor figs nor vines nor pomegranates? Here there is not even water to drink!" But Moses and Aaron went away from the assembly to the entrance of the meeting tent, where they fell prostrate.

Then the glory of the LORD appeared to them, and the LORD said to Moses, "Take your staff and assemble the community, you and your brother Aaron, and in their presence order the rock to yield its waters. From the rock you shall bring forth water for the congregation and their livestock to drink." So Moses took his staff from its place before the LORD, as he was ordered. He and Aaron assembled the community in front of the rock, where he said to them, "Listen to me, you rebels! Are we to bring water for you out of this rock?" Then, raising his hand, Moses struck the rock twice with his staff, and water gushed out in abundance for the people and their livestock to drink. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you were not faithful to me in showing forth my sanctity before the children of Israel, you shall not lead this community into the land I will give them."

These are the waters of Meribah, where the children of Israel contended against the LORD, and where the LORD revealed his sanctity among them.

Mt 16:13-23

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He 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. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Numbers 20: 1-13, Matthew 16: 13-23

These scriptures are really kind of fun to play with. We shouldn't be too surprised that divine inspiration creates play for seeking understanding.

The whole rock story and Moses punishment have confused scholars from back then through now. At first look, this is another one of those Exodus stories where the people lose heart and God comes to the rescue using Moses and nature as His instruments.

Here Moses bangs on the rock with his staff, the people's thirst (meant to have a double meaning here) is quenched and faith restored... but Moses is told he screwed up:

*"Because you were not faithful to me in showing forth my sanctity before the children of Israel, you shall not lead this community into the land I will give them."*

So what did Moses do wrong? Banging on the rock instead of ordering it? Scolding the Israelites? Making it sound like he was the one bringing out the water? Nobody really knows for sure. It does seem to hinge on: *Because you were not faithful to me...*

Matthew's Gospel continues with the question of faith. *But who do you say that I am?*

Good ol' Simon Peter gets it right. Jesus told him so and confirmed that Simon Peter's recognition is nothing else but God inspired. What follows is Jesus naming Peter for who and what he is: *Petron*, rock...the famous "*upon this rock...*" story that so many of us are familiar with as the foundation of our worshipping community.

But like so many of us who know how to snatch defeat out of the jaws of victory, Peter doesn't exit this reading before he messes up big time ... to the point that Jesus calls him Devil!!

Just when Jesus proclaimed the prophesy of the world's salvation, at the price of Jesus' self-gift, Peter responded NO. Peter could not look past the loss of the man he loved most. He could not see that in Jesus' self-gift, Jesus held nothing back from his Father, this world, or us. All so that nothing would any longer stand between us and eternal life in the Father.

Peter's earlier divine insight had been replaced by his own human attachments. What happened to his earlier faith? Being called Satan I'm sure woke him up. Peter is trainable after all.

Jesus had called Peter "*an obstacle*". The original Greek is "*skandalon*" which may also be translated as "*stumbling block*". There may be some stone word play here where Peter can be "*Rock*" & "*Stumbling Block*". Peter in one instance is the rock we can relay on and in another instance is the rock that is in the way.

Do we know the difference when we are the healing rock for our brothers and sisters to rely on, or when we are the obstinate rock that gets in the way of their well-being?

The clue in the Moses and the Peter stories is clear: faith.

When we decide to do it our way, because we know, because we understand, we set ourselves up for something other than the divine good. When we allow ourselves to be open to God's Word: in the Scriptures, in our Savior, in God's image in the person next to you, then we too may be *Petron*, God's Rock.

You, too, may be able to also answer Jesus' question: "*But who do you say that I am?*"

