



Homily for 8/23/2020

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

In 2004 I made a Profession of Faith before I was ordained a deacon. I renewed it when I was ordained a priest and again when I was made pastor of this parish. When the bishop comes on September 28 for the official opening of the Tribunal for the canonization of the Servant of God Father Ryan Cause, I will again renew my profession of faith and take the oath of office also as the new Judicial Vicar for the Diocese, that oath having been delayed because of the coronavirus.

In the Profession of Faith, after I recite the Nicene Creed and reaffirm that I will hold all the doctrines of faith, I will also say, “Moreover, I adhere with religious submission of will and intellect to the teachings which either the Roman Pontiff or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise their authentic Magisterium.” Then I will make my oath of office to, “always preserve communion with the Catholic Church.” This is the profession of faith and Oath of Office every bishop, priest, deacon and layperson takes when assuming any office within the church. I thought in light of this upcoming renewal in my life as a priest and owing to the opportunity afforded by today’s Gospel on the Commissioning of Peter as the Rock upon which Jesus would build his Church, it would be good to delve into the reasons behind hierarchical communion and the theological underpinnings of authority in the Church.

“Who do people say that I am?” Jesus asks. They answer echoing the confusion surrounding his mysterious ministry. Then he narrows it down to the 12. Who do *you* say that I am? Simon Peter speaks on behalf of the 12. Moved by the Holy Spirit who has revealed this to him in faith, he says that Jesus is the anointed one - the Messiah. But he also adds “son of the living God”, recognizing Jesus as the Divine Messiah, exceeding all the expectations of Israel. In response to this confession of faith Jesus changes Simon’s name. Now he will be called “Peter”.

Simon, son of Jonah, now takes on the role of Peter the rock. Peter is Greek for rock. When someone gets a name change in the Bible, there is a mission being given. The name symbolizes the mission. Jesus sets the Church on a rock following his own advice in Matthew 7:24-27 where he says, “Be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.” Peter as rock, will be the foundation of the Church that Jesus will build.

It is important to note, this power is not a personal authority but an official authority exercising power in the name of Christ. Notice how Jesus does not say, “You are Peter upon which I will build *The* Church.” Rather, He says, You are Peter and upon this Rock I will build “*my* Church”. It is not Peter’s Church. It is Jesus’ Church. It is His and it does not belong to those who rule it in his name. In the Prophet Isaiah today we hear how God prepares for this day with a prefiguration of the office of Vicar of the Kingdom of Israel. We hear about Shebna and Eliakim, who were both chosen successively to be the Master of the Palace, that is, the vice-regent, the prime minister of the Kingdom. They ruled in the name of the King and the King ruled in the name of “I Am Who Am”, the God of Israel. Jesus very clearly made parallels with this passage from Isaiah when he instituted Simon Peter as his Vicar on Earth. And just like Shebna’s power went to Eliakim and the succession continued after him, so, too, here Jesus intends to establish an office with a successive vicariate power. Simon Peter is the first to hold the office which is continued through the successors of St. Peter we have come to know as our “papa”, the Pope. The rock is the office, not necessarily the man himself. There have been 266 men who have held the office of Peter, the first being Simon Bar-Jonah and the latest being Jorge Bergolio. Jorge Bergolio by himself is not the pope, just as Simon Bar-Jonah was not the pope until he received the name and mission of Peter. It is only when the office of Rock was entrusted to him that he occupied the role of vicar of Christ. In our day Jorge Bergolio, an Argentinian bishop, has been chosen to occupy the office of Peter and is therefore the “papa”, the father and visible head of the Church. That is why traditionally a pope takes on a new name. As distinct from his baptismal name of Jorge, Pope Francis



has now taken on a new office and mission and thus a new name. Pope Francis does not just speak as an ordinary man, he speaks as Peter when he confirms the faith of the brethren and authentically teaches that which is held firmly in the deposit of faith. He is the Vicar of Christ.

It is wisdom, therefore, to stay with the rock that Christ founded especially if there are storms, floods, wind and rain all around us, as no doubt one can describe our present age. Individual popes come and go, but the office remains. It is only in remaining in communion with this rock that we will find Christ in the fullness of truth. This is the reason for the profession of faith and the oath of office to maintain communion with Peter and the Apostles, the Bishops of the Church.

This is also the constant witness of the early Church. There is a famous saying from St. Ambrose of Milan, “*Ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia*”, “Where Peter is, there is the Church.” Peter is the foundation of the Body of the Church; Christ is its head. The head and the body of Christ are inseparable. If you are separated from the body, you are separated from the head. Ecclesial communion with the body of Christ is necessary for salvation. This is where we get another famous theological axiom, “*Extra Ecclesia nullus salus*”, “Outside the Church there is no salvation.” Many have mistakenly assumed that the Church no longer teaches this, claiming that Vatican II did away with this teaching. However, we find in one of the most important documents of the council, *Lumen Gentium*, the following statement:

LG 14. This Sacred Council wishes to turn its attention firstly to the Catholic faithful. Basing itself upon Sacred Scripture and Tradition, it teaches that the Church, now sojourning on earth as an exile, is necessary for salvation. ... Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved.

Even after this clear assertion, owing to a misinterpretation of the pastoral passages that follow, there was still much confusion on this point. Therefore, Pope St. John Paul II issued a document through the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith called *Dominus Iesus*, “The Lord Jesus”, in the year 2000 in order to set forth exactly what the Church teaches.

Dominus Iesus

*The Catholic faithful are required to profess that there is an historical continuity — rooted in the apostolic succession — between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church: “This is the single Church of Christ... which our Savior, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care (cf. Jn 21:17), commissioning him and the other Apostles to extend and rule her (cf. Mt 28:18ff.), erected for all ages as 'the pillar and mainstay of the truth' (1 Tim 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, [subsists in] the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him”. With the expression “subsists in”, the Second Vatican Council sought to harmonize two doctrinal statements: on the one hand, that the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully **only** in the Catholic Church, and on the other hand, that “outside of her structure, many elements can be found of sanctification and truth”, that is, in those Churches and ecclesial communities which are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church. But with respect to these, it needs to be stated that “they derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church”.*

17. Therefore, there exists a single Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him.

God desires everyone to be a part of one church, under one leader, the successor of St. Peter, the vicar of Christ. As the Catechism states: §882: *The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, “is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful.”* In order to remain in union with Christ, we must remain in communion with His Rock.



But the Pope is not his own. He must always remember he is the Vicar of Christ. That means he must render an account of his stewardship of the Church to Jesus on the last day. Pope Benedict XVI said this in a homily his first year as Pope:

*The power that Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors is, in an absolute sense, a mandate to serve. The power of teaching in the Church involves a commitment to the service of obedience to the Faith. The pope is not an absolute monarch whose thoughts and desires are law. On the contrary: the pope's ministry is a guarantee of obedience to Christ and to his Word. **He must not proclaim his own ideas, but rather constantly bind himself and the Church to obedience to God's Word, in the face of every attempt to adapt it or water it down, and every form of opportunism.** ... The pope knows that in his important decisions, **he is bound to the great community of faith of all times, to the binding interpretations that have developed throughout the Church's pilgrimage.** Thus, his power is not being above the Word of God, but at the service of it. It is incumbent upon him to ensure that this Word continues to be present in its greatness and to resound in its purity, so that it is not torn to pieces by continuous changes in usage.*

In these trying times, when the rain and the wind threaten to blow over the House of God, don't be too quick to abandon the office of Peter simply because one man or another occupies it now. Let's put our trust in the Lord Jesus who established the office of the Rock and whose Holy Spirit undergirds it still.

May Jesus Christ be praised!