

Readings

Is 22:19-23

Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 6, 8

Rom 11:33-36

Mt 16:13-20

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At a young age, I took “Peter” for my confirmation name. I really didn’t know why at the time, other than that he was a well-known saint. Now, I can see why I took it! Because like Peter, I can shoot my mouth off sometimes and get into trouble. I also tend to think that I can walk on water, but then frequently sink with weak faith. And I have all sorts of good intentions, but before the cock crows, I am denying the Lord by my words and actions.

Peter was a weak and imperfect man, who never really distinguished himself as a leader – a simple fisherman! Yet in today’s gospel, we see the greatness of a person who deepens and grows in faith and discipleship as a hope for all of us. We see a bold Peter willing to stick his neck out on behalf of the disciples in response to Jesus’ question demanding to know, “Who do *you* say that I am?”

“You are the Christ,” Simon Peter says, “Son of the living God.”

Did Peter really understand what he was confessing, what it meant and what this would demand of him as a follower? Certainly, he had followed Jesus and heard his teaching and preaching about the Kingdom of God, and he often saw Jesus curing the sick and those in distress. But did he have it all down pat? I think not.

Yet Peter made the leap of faith. Jesus acknowledges this and lifts him up, saying to Simon, “Blessed are you” and in so many words, “for you came to this not from your own human

reasoning but from an internal revelation of the Father.” Somehow, God was touching Simon, gifting him with a new consciousness. And Jesus gives Simon the name Peter, meaning “rock,” which defines his vocation: being the rock on which Jesus would build his church.

On that day in Caesarea Philippi, Peter came to know not only the true identity of Jesus but he discovered the gift of his own identity as well. The fisherman was a rock weighted by the infinite love of God in Christ. From him, others will come to know a solid sense of themselves as a community of disciples in Jesus, sharing in his mission.

Peter would come back to this deepest identity over and over again. He had to be reminded of it, challenged by it and strengthened by it. Because the rock faltered frequently. From being chastised as “Satan” for refusing to accept Jesus’ predicted suffering; to putting limits on forgiving others (“I tell you not 7 but 70 times 7”); to being the great pretender in Jesus’ worst hour (“Lord, I am prepared to go to prison and die with you...”), Peter would so often come up short.

But knowing that Jesus never stopped calling him “Peter,” the rock always came back to his deepest self in Christ and his love. He came back in humility, in repentance, in weeping for having denied his friend. It took Peter a lifetime to deepen and grow in his faith, but he did the work of surrendering himself to healing and relying on the work of God’s power within. This enabled him to be a rock for others in leadership and to strengthen and confirm others in the faith. In the face of much persecution, he gave himself in ministry and ultimately in dying for Christ.

Where do we fit in with all of this?

For many of us, we don’t know such a deep faith but one that has become shallow, diminished or even deadened over time. Things happen. It could be our own human failure, or

rocky situations in our lives, in the world, or in the church that have left us discouraged, dismayed, disgraced, disheartened. We can be blocked by many things.

Yet Christ in love still calls out to us. Still offers us his hand that we may not sink. Peter's journey of faith tells us we can begin again by listening to Jesus' powerful question, "Who do you say that I am?" As Peter opened himself, God brought him to the depths where he found his strength to know the anointed one and discover his deepest self in Christ's indwelling love. God can touch us deeply as well. When we know this gift, we can live on rock-solid ground. We can be forgiven and healed to live anew in freedom as the Body of Christ, the Church and bring new life into the Church of our times.

As we look at Peter's faith, may our own be strengthened and renewed. We may falter again like the fisherman, but in trust we come back to the gift of our deep knowing: "You are the Christ, Son of the living God."