

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily: Based on Isaiah 22:19-23, Rom 11:33-36 and Mt 16:13-20

“Firmly professing our Faith in the Lord and taking firm refuge in the Church – the Body of People – as our ‘travelling Guide,’ so that, our travel becomes a beautiful melody – filled with joy and mirth!”

An incident is said about a visitor, when he came to River Mississippi (the second longest river in North America). He had to go across the river, but found that there was no bridge. Fortunately, it was winter time, and the great river was completely sheeted over with ice. But the visitor was afraid to walk over the ice, not knowing its thickness. Finally, with immense caution and fear, he began to creep on his hands and knees... over the sheeted ice... constantly fearing, whether, the ice would be able to hold him up or whether it would crack any time. He managed to get half-way through, when suddenly, he heard singing from behind. Cautiously, he turned around and was shocked to see the sight: Another traveller – a native of the land – was coming behind him...Driving a four-horse load of coal, over the ice...singing, with joy and mirth, as he went! That was the difference between the two – the visitor and the native! The visitor was in constant fear, not knowing when the ice would break away and he would be inside the waters! The native was in complete bliss, fully knowing that the ice was strong enough to contain his weight, as well as the load of his materials!

Similar is our Faith-journey. Going alone, without any idea of the Way, is always filled with risk and fear. But when we travel with those who are well-aware of the Way...the travel becomes a beautiful melody – filled with joy and mirth! Our Good God in His Great Wisdom has entrusted each of us, in the care of ‘The Body of

People’ – Who are well-aware of the Way – and thus travelling along, will make our faith-life filled with joy and mirth. This ‘Body of People’ is The Church! Yes, the Church is the “pillar and foundation – the bulwark – of Truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

The Gospel of the Day presents before us the Faith Statement of Peter, the leader of the group of the Apostles...and Jesus declaring to him: “...on this rock, I will build my Church; and never will the powers of death overcome it!” (Mt 16:18). The Great Rock... entrusts Peter, the rock and assures Him that the Church will always stay Rock-grounded! Let’s get to some of the Basics of the Church.

The word “Church”, in Greek is... “Ekklesia.” Ekklesia can be split to two words... “ek” = out of + “kaleo” = to call

This gives us an important meaning of EKKLESIA – THE CHURCH.... TO BE CALLED OUT OF.... The Church is a Body....to be called out of the world...to be called out of materialistic and worldly gains...into being a Family in God!... into being a sign of hope and salvation! This gives us a clue to many aspects of the Church...and which will help our own understanding. The Church is not a mere building... the Church is the People of God. We often, reduce the Church in our everyday vocabulary, to a mere building made of stones and cement...But, the Church is made of living stones (1 Pet 2:5).

And all of us need to contribute our mite in keeping alive this Church of God. Do I give my share of talents and gifts to the Church is keeping it effective and relevant for our modern times? Do I make sacrifices and offer prayers for the Church so that she may stand strong in the midst of struggles? Do I promote and encourage the Teachings of the Church and find beauty and wisdom in them?

It is very interesting to note the parallel between today's Gospel Passage and another passage of the Bible – Is 22:19-23 (the First Reading of the Day)

1. In Is 22: 22a: Eliakim is entrusted with the “key” of the House of David. In Mt 16:19: Jesus says to Peter, “I will give you the ‘keys’ of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

2. In Is 22: 22b: It is said about Eliakim: “when he opens, no one shall shut; when he shuts, no one shall open.” In Mt 16: 19b: Jesus says to Peter: “Whatever you bound on earth, shall be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.”

3. The name “Eliakim” means “God will place” or “God will establish.” The new name given to Simon – “Peter” means “rock.”

4. Eliakim would be the vicar of Hezekiah, who was the King of Israel. Peter would be Vicar of Jesus, the King of the New Israel -the people who accept His Reign in their lives!

It is also noteworthy, to see that in the Old Testament, God is often referred to as the “Rock” (eg. Ps 18:2, Dt 32:4). Now, Peter is called by this name “rock” to suggest, that the Church would be the channel of “the functions of God, the Rock.”

a. The Rock was the source of water in the wilderness (Dt 8:15). The Church, is the channel of Living Waters of Grace, provided in the Sacraments.

b. The Rock protected Moses and covered him and thus becomes a source of refuge (Ex 33:22). The Church, is the refuge for the sinners and the home for those who are lost.

c. The Rock speaks of the nature of God – solid, strengthening and immutable.

The Church, remains solid in her traditions, strong in her beliefs even in changing situations of the world, and infallible in her magisterial teachings. These parallels show, how the Lord had established His Church on Peter – the rock – to be a constant “traveller” in our Faith-journey.

St Paul speaks of the immense depth of the Mysteries of the Lord: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Rom 11:33). Let us seek shelter and solutions from Holy Mother, the Church in our spiritual journey to “Learn, Love and Live the Mysteries of the Lord in our lives.”

Today, let us firmly profess our Faith in the Lord, answering from the depth of our hearts to that very personal question of the Lord: “Who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16: 15)...And take firm refuge in the Church – the Body of People, Who are well-aware of the Way – as our “travelling Guide”... so that, our travel becomes a beautiful melody – filled with joy and mirth!