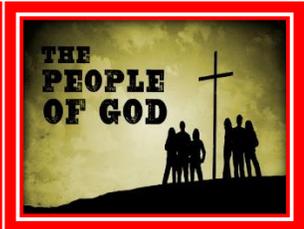
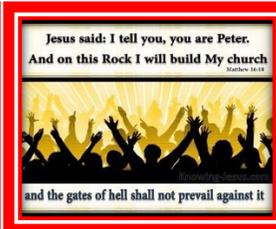
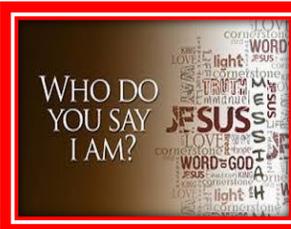


August 23, 2020 – 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time



**“Firmly professing our Faith in the Lord and taking firm refuge in the Church – the Body of People – as our 'traveling Guide,' so that, our travel becomes a beautiful melody – filled with joy and mirth!”
(Isaiah 22:19-23, Rom 11:33-36 and Mt 16:13-20)**

A soldier working in the army – who was known for his bravery and never-give-up attitude – was asked by a journalist: “What is the motivation for you to be so valiant and strong in your service?” To that, the soldier replied: “Well, we have a saying in our army and I try to follow that. The saying is this: ‘If someone says, he is not afraid of death then he is either lying or he is in the army!’ I have lived in this way of life, living this truth!” As Christians, we are all soldiers of Christ. Are we ready to have the courage to face any situation of difficulty, including death, and seek to be ever faithful to the Lord and His Church?

The Gospel of the Day presents to us the Faith Statement of Peter, the leader of the band of the Apostles and Jesus declaring to him that, “...on this rock, I will build my Church; and never will the powers of death overcome it!” (Mt 16:18).

1. Faith Statement of Peter – Gifted with Faith

Peter makes a strong profession of faith in Christ. He says, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” The very first thing that Jesus reminds Peter is that his faith does not come from flesh and blood, but from the revelation of our Heavenly Father. Peter did not believe in Christ because he was smarter or more observant than other people. He believed because he had been gifted with faith that comes from a God who loved him. The same is true for us. We have faith in Jesus Christ not because we are particularly intelligent or good. We believe because God has loved us and gifted us with faith. There is a mystery here. Why do we believe in Christ and there still are so many good and intelligent people in the world who do not share in that faith? Why is it that people we love, and we would deeply desire to believe, sometimes cannot do so. The only explanation is that we have been given faith and others have not. We should respond to such a gift in humility and in thankfulness.

2. Church – Community of Faith – People of God

Jesus – the Great Rock entrusts to Peter, the rock and assures Him that the Church will always stay rock-grounded. The Lord had and still has great Faith and Trust in His

Church. But, personally, we need to ask: Am I sometimes doubtful, uncertain, and hesitant with respect to the Church?

The word “Church”, in Greek, is Ekklesia. Ekklesia can be split into 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 into being a Family and Fellowship in God. The Church is a body to be called out of materialistic and worldly gains and be 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 – especially in our everyday vocabulary – to a mere building made of stones and cement. But, we need to realize and remember that 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 in 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?

Perhaps one reason we find ourselves in a cribbing position, with respect to the Church is because of our failure to understand its nature and also have our own misunderstandings and prejudices.

When Jesus asked His disciples, “Who am I” (Mt 16: 13) he got varied answers some surprising, some unexpected.

- The Mystery of Jesus was so great that people failed to grasp who actually He was. The Mystery of the Church is also great that people fail to understand her and even form opposing opinions.
- We may feel that the Church is too traditional and too conservative and too authoritarian, but we fail to see that she has preserved many morals, kept safe human values, and promoted holiness.
- We may feel that the Church is all too mistaken in many areas and has committed many blunders, but we ought to know that the Church has a human dimension and despite it, the Spirit of the Lord leads.
- We may feel that the Church is just too bad with scandals and hypocrites and has lost all credibility, but we need to realize that the evil one attacks those who strive for sanctity and tries to disrupt God’s plans.
- The Church undergoes the pain of many a misunderstanding. Christ too underwent the same.
- The Church suffers the bad name of being called by many names. Christ too underwent the same.

From a negative aspect, What is a Hospital? Diseases, Blood, Pus, Screaming, Pains, Twisted bodies, Suffering. But from a Positive Aspect, What is a Hospital? Care, Healing, Love, Solace, Relief, Aid, Selfless Service. Our Church can be understood in similar tones. Weaknesses are plenty yet when seen from a Divine perspective, she is Holy. All of us are concerned about the growing rejection of Church and Christian values in our society. But we who are Baptized and who seek the good of the Church, ought to join our hands and seek to revive the relevance and importance of the Church.

The Church has its weaknesses, but the Church needs Powerful Persons “in You and Me”. The Church has its negatives, but the Church needs Passionate Lovers of God “in You and Me. The Church has its flaws, but the Church needs Committed Preachers of the Word “in You and Me”

The Body of Christ while hanging on the Cross was weak but “No bone of His was broken” (Jn 19:36). The Church of Christ while living in the world may be weak but No bone shall be broken. On this rock, I will build my Church; and never will the powers of death overcome it”

3. Faith is a gift connected to Community – People of God:

Faith is a gift. It is a gift connected to the community. Faith and church community go together. People who say they believe in Christ and yet to not associate themselves with a believing community have an incomplete faith, because the entire witness of Israel and of the scriptures testify that believing and church go together. In choosing Christ we do more than making an individual decision to believe, we also commit ourselves to brothers and sisters who believe the same thing with us. **Faith in Christ requires a place where we worship God with others and serve one another in Jesus’ name.**

Faith is a gift. The church community is a gift. Let us celebrate with humility because we have been chosen to believe. Let us celebrate with thankfulness because we have been given one another. Let us celebrate with the commitment to pass on both our faith and our community to others.

Let us pray:

Let Jesus, the Great Rock help us to stand firm and become passionate in service of the Church and being ready to face any challenge or problem, let it be said of us: “If someone says, he is not afraid of death or problems in life then he is either lying or he is a Christian’.

Jesus, I Trust In You