

Twenty-First Sunday Year A. 27 August 2023. Nothing Shall Prevail Against the Church of God

Today's gospel is a continuation of what we have read last week, in which we were told that Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon, a pagan territory. Today the gospel said, he went into the region of Caesarea Philippi where he asked his disciples who do they and other people say of him? It was a usual tradition that after the end of every session in schools, every teacher was required to be evaluated, and the students are expected to be frank in their evaluations. This was similar to what Jesus asked his disciples to do.

First, he asks what people say the Son of Man is? The responses he got were quite interested but different views. Some said, John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Pretty but not correct, the people associated Jesus not with bad personalities but with outstanding personalities. However, they do not yet understand who he was. Having known people's perceptions, he asked that of the disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter receives a revelation from God, and he answers correctly. In the first phase of his question, he receives unconvincing answers, guessing that were not genuine, but Peter's answer was genuine. In our confused world, we must not rush in making decisions; we must allow God to reveal what he intended for us. Sometimes because we are rushing, we neglect the revelation of God and do what we think is suitable for us; our decision is made perfect when we listen to the revelation of God. God's revelation is devoid of hatred to individuals or groups, malice, pride, greedy and selfishness. But is full of love kindness, forgiveness, friendship, generosity, tolerance, and patience. When we allow God to reveal his purpose for us, and we adequately utilize them, our world would become a better place for us to leave.

Note, that this was not the first time we heard this kind of confession of faith, prior to this, Nathaniel had confessed Christ as the Son of God (John 1:49), in the gospel of Matthew the disciple declared him God's Son after he calmed the storm 14:33 and Canaanite woman confessed Him as the Son of David (Messiah). Matthew 15:21.

What differentiated the confession was the fact that Peter's confession as "Christ, Son of the living God" was more profound and more acceptable by Jesus because there was no faking in it. Jesus used the opportunity to deepen Peter's faith by giving him responsibility which is of "God". Jesus calls him Rock not because he was worthy, but to represent the actual Rock (God). In the Old Testament, Rock is a symbol of God and Perfection, which is why the Psalmist says, "The Lord is my Rock and my Fortress." 28:2. In the New Testament, Jesus gave it a new meaning which means "a stone" Cephas in Aramaic. Jesus was preparing Peter to be the foundation of the Church, though Christ is the actual foundation, but Peter was to represent him.

Peter shared in the authority of Jesus, and we by the virtue of our Baptism we are also sharers of the authority of his Words. Despite the solid foundation of the Church, and the promises of Jesus "the gate of Hades shall not prevail against it, she continues to face challenges, from within and without. John the Baptist was beheaded for telling the truth. Jesus was crucified for the truth by the Jewish authorities, and the Church after Jesus, struggled with persecution. Peter was crucified upside down by Emperor Nero. St Andrew was crucified in an X shape cross at Achaia by Governor

Acgeus. Mark was dragged upon a rock until he died. Thaddeus was beheaded in Persia. James, the brother of John the beloved was stabbed to death. St James the lesser was stoned to death. St Philip was hanged against a pillar at Phrygia. Thomas was run with a lance. Matthew was murdered with the sword. St Stephen was stoned to death. The more Christians are persecuted, the more the church blossoms. During the second century, many heresies and heretics arose against the Church: but the Church still stands, for she is built upon Christ the Rock. Indeed, like the Psalmist, we can all say Lord, your love is eternal do not forsake the work of your hands.

Peace,

Fr. JINGBE Simon