

Growing into Responsibility

August 23, 2020, Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time – Gospel of Matthew 16.13-20
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First Jesus asks, 'Who do people say that I am?' Then he says, 'Who do you say that I am?'

Clearly the second question is more penetrating and personal. It is a reminder that us depending on what other people think about things is not enough.

In our faith journey we are challenged to go beyond what other people think and beyond doing things just because that's the most accepted way.

That's a hard threshold to cross because it means we have to make choices that may not necessarily be popular ones.

When we do this with honesty and openness this we might say that our Lord is inviting us to take on more responsibility.

And maybe therein lies part of the fear- - the fear we have of taking on responsibility because we know we have to change our actions and expand our worldview.

To accept Christ as the Messiah as Peter confessed, the implications for Peter and all who follow suit, have life changing implications.

Throughout the Old Testament we see how the Lord impelled Moses, David, and the prophets forward, with a mission to spread the ways of God among the people and urge fidelity. And this was so often met with great resistance.

And in the New Testament we see Jesus' message met with great resistance and, for St. Paul, the same thing.

Ultimately in our faith journeys, each of us is invited to discover more and more, that our consolation and comfort comes from God alone and not from the circumstances of our lives.

Jesus' penetrating question to his closest followers challenges them to go beyond merely accepting what the rest of the world finds acceptable.

Peter gives a definitive response that reveals a deep recognition of Jesus' true identity and mission in the world.

And that revelation and recognition becomes the groundwork or foundation for Christ's mission on earth.

Jesus' mission is not only to proclaim the Good News and teach a new way of living in relationship with the Father, but also to pass on responsibility to his first followers, the apostles and through them onward to all of humanity- - to His Church.

As Christians - - as followers of Christ, are we moving toward accepting a deeper responsibility for our faith and the sense of stewardship that goes with it.

In the first reading from Isaiah, Shebna is the steward who is thrown out of office and replaced by the servant of God, Eliakim.

The irresponsible one is replaced by a responsible one.

This is alarming news to the irresponsible.

The relationship between Jesus and Peter is an interesting one with many ups and downs.

Peter is not scholarly, he's not clever, he is a bit of a loose cannon....speaks before thinking things through. And he is simply a fisherman.

Yet there is something about Peter that leads to the moment where Jesus affirms Peter's confession.

Peter may be grossly ill equipped for the task he would be eventually be asked to take on, but one cannot say he was irresponsible – and in spite of his failures and short-sightedness, Peter does want to get it right throughout.

Remember the passage where Jesus asks Peter do you want to leave as well like the rest? Peter's reply is, 'Where will we go?.... you have the words of eternal life.'

As we know there are many times during Jesus 3 year ministry that Peter tries to step up but fails. Just a few weeks ago in the Gospel, Peter boldly asks to follow Jesus out onto the water from the safety of the boat and....he proceeded to sink.

And of course we all know the story of Peter swearing up and down he would follow Jesus to the end and then proceed to fail at the end when he denies Jesus three times after his arrest.

And yet Jesus reaffirms Peter over and over.

We all need someone who believes in us in spite of our failures. Jesus believed in Peter and He believes in us, His Church. He wants us as His Church to carry the keys of the Kingdom. Yet our accepting our responsibility as disciples of Christ is a work in progress.

If we are so hung up on our personal rights or our power over others that it clouds our respect and sensitivity to those around us, we are not yet mature enough for the responsibilities of the kingdom God. And that includes those with institutional roles in the church who abuse their power.

If we hold grudges against those who hurt us, we are not mature enough for the responsibilities God has in mind for us.

Or we may blame ourselves for everything and fail to forgive ourselves, we are not yet mature enough to take on responsibilities God may have in mind for us.

Our second reading from Saint Paul to the Romans alludes to the notion that ***God's judgements are unsearchable and his ways inscrutable.***

Therefore it is irresponsible of any of us to cast judgement and throw stones at one another because none of us have all the answers.

We can't make choices for other people any more than they can make choices for us.

Many would say our free choice is both a gift and a curse.

Ultimately, we must answer for ourselves, ***'Who do you say Jesus is?'***

So perhaps like Peter, we can come to see that the Church that the Lord founded on Peter is a space that leaves room for failure but also challenges us to grow.

The Church began with Peter and like Peter, our Lord believes in us in spite of our failures. Of all Peter's flaws and failings, he was indeed able, through the grace of God, to admit he was wrong and then carry on, mature and eventually take on enormous responsibility. He became trustworthy before God.

May we, his Church grow in that same trustworthiness.