

Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul, Year C

GOSPEL

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When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ,' he said, 'the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.'

(Matthew 16:13-19)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- In the Bible, when God changes someone's name it is usually because they are being given a new mission.
- Both Peter and Paul had their names changed. Simon became Peter, and Saul became Paul.
- The Nicene Creed professes the Church to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic. No matter how distant we are from the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth, Christ is present to us still—in a special way through the sacramental ministry of bishops, the successors to the apostles, and their co-workers, the clergy.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Everything hinges upon one critical question: who is Jesus? The famous 'trilemma' of CS Lewis was that either Jesus was who he said he was—the Son of God—or he was a dangerous liar or madman. The only thing he could not be, Lewis argued, was simply a great moral teacher.

In today's Gospel, Peter reaches this crucial juncture. While many of Jesus' listeners at the time considered him a prophet, it was Peter who spoke up with the truth: 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' What did this mean? Perhaps Peter himself did not realise the full implications of those words, but Jesus affirmed them. He said it was the heavenly Father who had directly revealed this to Peter. This confession of Christ's identity is the foundational claim of Christianity and is what energises the missionary activity of the apostles throughout the New Testament. After all, it was not something that came from them: it was news from heaven.

Knowing the proclamation of this truth would be spread far and wide, Jesus does something else significant: he establishes apostolic authority. He begins to form his visible body on earth, which he calls 'my church', and which no powers of evil would overcome.

- Explore the relationship between the 'Petrine' mission of the Church (the structure) and the 'Pauline' mission (the evangelical).
- How do they work together to preach the Gospel to all nations?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- People today have many different images or understandings of Jesus. Some, perhaps, have received no understanding at all. Explore some of the common depictions of Jesus in popular culture.
- Have you had a significant turning point in your journey with faith, like Peter had when questioned by Jesus?
- Has anything ever been revealed to you that you know didn't come from you?
- Have you ever experienced resistance to your inquiry into Christian faith?
- In today's other readings, we see the challenges and imprisonment of both Peter and Paul for preaching the Gospel, but they both show trust in Christ's promise that the gates of Hades would not prevail against them. This week, make the words from the psalm your daily prayer:

'The angel of the Lord is encamped around those who fear him, to rescue them. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed the warrior who seeks refuge in him' (Ps 34:8-9).

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

'The word "Church" (Latin ecclesia, from the Greek ek-ka-lein, to "call out of") means a convocation or an assembly ... The equivalent Greek term Kyiake, from which the English word Church and the German Kirche are derived, means "what belongs to the Lord"' (CCC §751).

- The desire to belong is a basic need of the human heart. Explore where people find belonging today, and what might be drawing them away from belonging totally to the Lord.

Jesus does not promise his disciples an easy time. Consistent with God's approach in the Old Testament, he is honest about the opposition the Church will face in the world. But the words of St Paul should be our own: 'The Lord will rescue me from all evil attacks on me, and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom' (2 Tim 4:18).

