

Homily 21st Sunday of the Year was preached by Canon Thomas O'Connor

Today's Gospel reading tells us of Saint Peter's profession of faith, near Caesarea Philippi. Our Lord put the question to his apostles. "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" And it is clear from their answer that Jesus was regarded as a great prophet, even perhaps one of the old prophets come back to life.

Jesus went on to ask a further question, "Who do you say I am?" The apostles had been with Jesus for almost three years. They had listened to his preaching and witnessed his miracles. It was beginning to dawn on them, who he really was.

It was Peter who answered on behalf of the other apostles. "You are the Christ," he said, "The Son of the living God." It was a declaration of their conviction that Jesus truly was the Messiah. Saint Peter was marvelously rewarded for his profession of faith. Jesus founded the church of the apostles to continue the work of redemption. The mission of the church was to bring the good news of salvation to people everywhere, and to do this until the end of time.

Jesus promised Peter that he would be the most important person within the church, that he would be the head of the church. He changed Peter's name to "The Rock." Peter would be the firm rock. The solid foundation of which the church would stand. He went on to promise Peter and the apostles that the church would not be led into error. That the gates of hell would not prevail against it. That the church would be safeguarded from teaching matters of faith and morals to the whole world without being subject to the power of Satan.

Next, Jesus promised to give Peter the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. The keys are a symbol of authority and they denote the power which Peter would have as head of the church. And our Lord explained what this power is. The power to bind and to loose. To impose obligations and to release people from censures. Whatever is bound or loose on earth would be ratified by God in heaven.

The question posed by our Lord in the gospel, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" Could we try to answer that question for ourselves today?

We know a great deal about the Son of God, about our Lord Jesus Christ from reading the scriptures, from the teachings of the church. But how well do we really know our Lord? Is there any great depth to our knowledge, or is it rather superficial?

Think of the relationship between a husband and a wife. Very often, they are so much on the same wave length, that one can think and know what the other is thinking. And if you ask one of them a question, the other could almost certainly answer it correctly. Well, in our relationship with our Lord, we should aim to have something as deep and enduring as that between a loving husband and wife in marriage.

So today, then, let us ask ourselves the second question that Jesus asked the apostles in today's gospel. "Who do you think that I am?".

We can only have a close relationship with Christ through prayer, through the frequent reception of the sacraments, through reflection and meditation. So before we answer the question, "Who do you say I am," we should think very seriously before we give that answer. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.