

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday per Annum - A  
Isaiah 22:19-23;  
Romans 11:33-36;  
Matthew 16:13-20  
Little Flower - 8/27/17

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Jesus posed a question to his disciples, "*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*" They immediately replied, "*Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*" He then asked them the critical question, "*But who do you say that I am?*"

What Jesus was really asking was "*Who am I to you?*" Peter then responded, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" Neither Jesus' question nor Peter's answer was academic. Jesus was not conducting a catechism class. Peter gave a two-part answer. Jesus was and is the Son of the Living God; Jesus was and is the Christ, the anointed one, the messiah, the savior of the world, and, therefore, our personal savior. Although Peter spoke for the disciples, his answer was his personal profession of faith in Jesus rooted in his personal experience of Jesus and his relationship with Jesus.

It seems to me that there are at least four challenges to Catholic faith today. It is significant that Jesus immediately said, "*And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church....*" By linking Peter's profession of faith to the foundation of the Church, Jesus was making the point that Catholic Christian faith has two dimensions, a personal dimension and a communal dimension. Today people often say that they are good Christians because they believe in Jesus, pray, and live a good life. However, Christianity without Church, without community, is not the Christianity of Jesus.

Second, because we are living in a scientific and technological age, one of the challenges to Catholic faith today is our struggle with mystery. Today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans reminds us that our God is a God of mystery. For example, when most of us were young, we were taught that the greatest mystery was the mystery of the Trinity. How can there be three Persons in one God? We can never fully understand God just as we can never fully understand the mystery of another human being. Also, because we cannot scientifically prove the existence of God, we struggle to believe in God. We often struggle to believe God exists. Even more we struggle to entrust our lives and futures to God. This reading captures the only true response to the mystery of God: wonder and awe!

A third challenge to Catholic faith today is that we are living in a society of radical individualism. In today's first reading, God gave Eliakim real authority over the people of Israel. Likewise, when Jesus founded the Church on Peter, he also gave Peter authority over the Church: "*I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*" Our struggle with faith today is that we do not want anyone to tell us what to believe or how to act.

Finally, our faith is also challenged by all the divisions that exist within the Church. Last Sunday, I talked about the divisions within the United States. I find it fascinating that the same divisions that exist in our country also exist in our Church. At his introductory press conference, Archbishop Thompson said, "I think more often than not, the truth — I may say even authentic (church) orthodoxy — is found more in the center or the middle than it is on either side." I would strongly encourage you to read his article in this week's *Criterion* titled "We must engage in the 'Catholic Both/And' in today's world."

My brothers and sisters, today's readings challenge us to deepen our personal and communal relationship with each of the three Persons in God, to have a sense of wonder and awe before the mystery of God, to allow ourselves to be challenged by God's Word, and finally to work to tear down walls and build bridges within the Christian community.