

My Brothers and Sisters,

Last weekend two different parishioners suggested that I should start telling stories and jokes in my homilies as Fr. Giltus did. Fr. Giltus had a real gift I do not have. When I try to tell jokes and stories in homilies, they usually fall flat.

Today's Gospel continues last Sunday's Gospel. In last Sunday's Gospel, it was Peter who spoke for the other apostles and professed faith in Jesus: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Jesus responded, "*And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church*" [Mt. 16:18].

However, in today's Gospel, when Jesus prophesied his passion, death, and resurrection, Peter contradicted Jesus: "*God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you.*" Jesus then said to Peter, "*Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.*" In today's Gospel, Peter thought he knew better than Jesus what should happen.

The Gospels portray Peter as a very flawed human being. Twice more in the Gospels, Jesus gave Peter a special ministry and Peter did not get it. At the Last Supper, Jesus said to Peter, "*Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers.*" Peter responded, "*Lord, I am prepared to go to prison and to die with you.*" Jesus then replied, "*I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows this day, you will deny three times that you know me*" [Lk. 22:31-34]. In this passage, Peter overestimated his own strength and underestimated his need for God.

In John's Gospel, after the resurrection, Jesus asked Peter three times if Peter loved him. Three times Peter said yes. Three times Jesus told him to tend and feed his sheep before prophesying the death Peter would die and telling Peter to follow him. When Peter then asked what would happen to John, Jesus said, "*What concern is it of yours? You follow me*" [21:22].

Peter was also impetuous. When Jesus walked on the water, the apostles were afraid. After Jesus identified himself, Peter said, "*Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.*" Jesus responded, "*'Come.' Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how (strong) the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'*" [Mt. 14:28-31]. After Jesus was arrested, Peter denied him three times as Jesus had prophesied.

Later Paul wrote about a time when he corrected Peter for being hypocritical. In Antioch, Peter was eating with Gentiles until some Jewish Christians came to Antioch when he separated from them "*because he was afraid of the circumcised.*" [Gal. 2:12].

Peter's story has two implications for us. First, Peter, the man Jesus picked to be the rock on whom he would build his church, the man whom we call the first Pope, was a very flawed human being. A lot of Christians and Catholics leave the church or stop actively participating because they become disillusioned when church leaders and members are less than perfect or worse. Jesus chose weak, sinful human beings to be his apostles. St. Paul, for example, was involved in the martyrdom of St. Stephen. Therefore, we cannot expect today's church leaders or parishioners to be almost perfect people.

My brothers and sisters, just as Jesus chose flawed human beings to be the foundation of the Church, Jesus chooses us to carry on his ministry and mission in the world today despite our flaws and sinfulness. In the New Testament reading two weeks ago, we heard, "*For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.*" In other words, God never stops loving us and never stops calling us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves and to help carry on Jesus' mission and ministry in the world by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice.