

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA, MUMBLES

Reflection for

Twenty-First Sunday (A), August 23, 2020

(May be used for Home Prayer Service)

Dominican Friars, Swansea

This reflection may be used during the home prayer service. Please see the home prayer service sheet for details.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH COMES FROM GOD

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter declared Jesus as the Christ and the Son of the living God. Thus, Christ gave his authority to the Church in the office of Peter as the Prince of the Apostles to lead people to salvation.

We know God through his Spirit: When Jesus enquired about himself from his disciples, it was Peter who had the courage to speak up. He made his profession of faith in Jesus by declaring him as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16). Jesus immediately pointed out the reward of professing the true faith in him: eternal blessedness. Our profession of faith is a step towards eternal blessedness. However, mere human reasoning cannot lead us to believe in God. It is the Spirit of God living in us who reveals the truth of God to us. In the light of this, St Paul writes, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Also, it is by professing Jesus as the Lord whom the Father has sent that we find eternal life (cf. Jn 17:3). This knowledge of God is not just an intellectual knowledge, but one founded on faith and strengthened by obedience to God and commitment to his service.

Jesus: Christ and Son of God: These words summarise the person and mission of Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God who was anointed by God to save humanity. As the Son of God, he is divine in nature. As God-made-man, he is also human. He has saved us not just in his divinity but also in his humanity. With this profession, Peter declares Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah (Christos in Greek). He was spoken of by the prophets of old as one who would save his people from their sins (cf. Is 7:14, Mt 1:21). Unfortunately, he was not accepted by his own people “but to those who believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God” (Jn 1:11-12). By and large, the faith of the Church is founded on the belief that Christ is the Son of God and that he is the promised Messiah (Jn 20:31).

Christ Founded His Church on Peter: When Peter spoke on behalf of the other apostles, he literally acted as their spokesperson. Christ then confirmed the primacy of Peter among the apostles

when he called him ‘blessed’. Christ went further to establish his Church on Peter and on his profession of faith. Peter, which means rock, becomes the visible head of the Church of which Christ himself is the foundation stone (cf. Eph 2:20). In the Old Testament, it was Solomon, the son of David, who built the old Temple where the people of God worshipped. In the New Covenant, Jesus, the eternal Son of David (Mk 10:47), builds the new Temple, not with bricks and timber, but with his own Blood (Heb. 10:14).

The Church Acts on the Authority of Christ: Jesus has been given authority from the foundations of the world to reconcile all peoples to God (cf. Mt 28:20). In the context of the Gospel Reading, Christ gave the ‘keys of the kingdom of heaven’ to Peter. These keys symbolise Peter’s teaching authority in the Church. This authority is meant to lead people to Christ, the only Way to the Father (Jn 14:6). Popes, who are successors of Peter, also exercise these full, supreme, and universal authority over the Church (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 22). As well, the college of bishops, together with the Pope, also exercises the authority to teach and make decisions for the universal Church.

Christ Defends His Church from Evil: Christ prayed that no evil would overcome the Church. He not only prayed for the safety of his Church, Christ watches over her and protects it from the powers of the underworld. With the prayer of Christ, we are sure that no evil will overcome the Church. He himself has overcome the world for us (Jn 16:33).

Faith Elevates: Christ reminded Peter that it was not flesh and blood that revealed the truth to him but the Spirit of God. Here, ‘flesh and blood’ refers to our human limitations that prevent us from seeing beyond these human shortcomings. However, our faith in Christ elevates us above them and unites us to the divine life. Faith also makes us see beyond the tribulations of this life and enables us to see eternal life which has been promised to us. May our faith uplift us above every human difficulty and setbacks and raise us to the blessedness of the saints. Amen.