

24B SML 2018
MK 8:27-35

No other Apostle arouses so much sympathy in our hearts as Peter. He seems very close to us in:

- ✓ his conflicts and emotions,
- ✓ his strength and his weakness,
- ✓ his resolve to be heroic and his disastrous failure to live up to his aspiration.
- ✓ One moment, he's humble, at another, proud.
- ✓ He affirms fidelity to Our Blessed Lord, then denies Him.
- ✓ He is so supernatural, yet so very weak and natural.
- ✓ He extols as divine the Master he loves, only to be frightened by a little girl into saying that he does not know "the Man."

No chain is stronger than its weakest link, and the weakest link in the entire apostolic chain was the first link, Peter – and Jesus holds onto that. Hence, "Get behind me Satan," but as Matthew is quick to add, "the gates of hell shall not prevail."

It is fitting that the first one chosen by Jesus to be an apostle was given a new name to represent his new character. He did not however, lose his old name. Instead, he now has two names. He was, at one and the same time, Simon and Peter.

As Simon, he was the son of Jonah.

As Peter, he was an apostle of the Son of God.

Peter never entirely got rid of Simon. But once called, Simon never ceased to be Peter. Sometimes it was Simon who came to the fore; at other times, it was Peter.

The tug of war between his earthly life, named Simon, and his apostolic life, named Peter, was revealed at Caesarea Philippi, in his answer to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?"

Our Blessed Lord began by asking, "Who do people say that I am?" What is the Gallup Poll saying about Me? Their answer in modern language was:

- ✓ 22.4 percent say you are John the Baptist;
- ✓ 38.4 percent say you are Elijah;
- ✓ 24.3 percent say Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

Leave the decision of Who is Christ to the democratic process and there is nothing but contrary and contradictory answers.

After the appeal to the democratic process, He moved to the aristocratic. He appealed to:

- ✓ His House of Lords,
- ✓ His Apostles,
- ✓ His Parliament,

✓ His Senate

“And you, who do you say that I am?” And there was no answer as no one was appointed as their spokesman. What is more, they were uncertain of His identity.

Thomas was too sad and gloomy to be concerned with theological questions

Andrew, the public relations man of the apostolic band, was silent for he spoke only when he was introducing someone to someone else, for example:

- ✓ The boy with bread and fishes to Our Blessed Lord,
- ✓ His brother Simon to Our Blessed Lord,
- ✓ the Greeks to Our Blessed Lord.

Matthew the publican, who once sold out to the Romans, felt too tense to answer as he looked at Simon the Zealot who hated the Romans.

Philip the economist has no logistical problem to solve, like feeding five thousand, so the question was beyond his interests;

James the Less, the quiet, always deferring to his brother John

And John had one eye on Peter who seemed to be coming forward probably with his aggressive and impulsive questionings.

But this time, Simon Peter steps forward, and without the consent of the others, gave the right answer. “You are the Christ.” How did Peter know? Not from a study of apologetics or the motives of credibility. The light came neither from reason, nor education, but, says Matthew, from heaven. “Blessed are you, son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.”

Up to this point, we have:

- ✓ the Council of Chalcedon,
- ✓ the Hypostatic Union,
- ✓ the sublime truth that Christ is God and Christ is Man, or better yet, the God-Man.

And, at this point our theology stops as well as our spirituality. Why do we not continue reading what happened at Caesarea Philippi?

We know what man says about Christ.

We know what heaven says about Christ.

But what does Christ say about Christ?

Our Blessed Lord now goes on to say that He is the Servant of God, the Suffering Servant of God as prophesied by Isaiah. “He began to teach them that the Son of Man must

suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly.” Christ spoke this openly. And Christ has spoken openly ever since.

For all of the failures of some of her members, it is the Catholic Church who speaks God’s words openly, who protects Jesus from the cunning and the violence of popular opinion’s ego, who defines who Jesus is:

- ✓ from the Bible, and the books contained within it, as decided by the Catholic Church, from:
 - ✓ the Old Testament
 - ✓ to the Gospels,
 - ✓ to Paul’s speech offered to puzzled philosophers in Athens;
 - ✓ to the letters Paul wrote from prison,
 - ✓ to the Book of Revelation;
- ✓ from the archangel’s “Ave” to a Galilean girl to the infallible teaching of her Assumption as Queen of Heaven and Earth;
- ✓ as the Bethlehem baby, too weak to raise His head yet stronger than Caesar Augustus;
- ✓ as the One called “Rabbi” who flipped through the pages of the Torah to explain the Beatitudes;
- ✓ as the Warrior who picked a fight in the Temple Precincts by overturning a few tables;

- ✓ as the Man tortured to death on a hill outside Jerusalem with the words “Father forgive them” on His lips;
- ✓ as the Risen One who said “Peace” to those who abandoned and betrayed Him;
- ✓ from the small group of followers who gathered under Solomon’s Portico, to the Church that is present in every country throughout the world;
- ✓ from the arguments of Aquinas to the tear stained pages of Augustine’s Confessions;
- ✓ from the journeys of Jesuit missionaries to China and Japan;
- ✓ from the works of art at the Vatican to the cathedral of Notre Dame;
- ✓ from Teresa of Avila’s pierced heart Teresa of Calcutta’s call to feed the poorest of the poor;
- ✓ from the infallible teachings of the pope to the parish priest making sense of it all for those in the pews in front of him;

You are the Christ, said Peter, but despite all the failures we are facing in the current crisis in the Church right now, to hear Your Voice in all the ways just listed, that is what it means to be Catholic.