

Father John's Gospel Reflection



Gospel

GOSPEL – SUNDAY, 27 AUGUST, 2017

- Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (Matt 16:13-20)

You are Peter, to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ,' he said, 'the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.' Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection

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The passage begins with two questions - one a general question to 'the people', the second directed to the disciples. But already in the question is a hint of the answer. Jesus speaks of himself as 'the Son of Man'. Sure, the term speaks of Jesus in his humanity, but the Jewish hearer would think of Daniel 7, where the Son of Man is an exalted figure, with a vital role in the history of redemption.

In Jesus there is a certain subtlety - sometimes, when Jesus thought the time was ripe, he could be quite explicit.

Here Peter answers the second question with the correct response - Peter, here speaks for the disciples, for Matthew's gospel and the community to which it is first addressed, and certainly for us. We know it is the right answer because the narrator tells us so right at the beginning of the gospel (Matt 1:1). Jesus' response to Peter indicates that his identity as Messiah is not obvious by way of human insight - it is a discernment by divine revelation, and not obvious to 'flesh and blood'. While Peter gives the right answer, the meaning of Jesus' identity as messiah is not yet fully revealed. The stern order of Jesus to secrecy (v.20) implies that the answer is not obvious to human insight, but that what the answer looks like in this time and place requires further discernment.

The Gospel of Matthew was written shortly after the failed Jewish revolt against Rome. In the wake of the destruction of the Temple, and the devastation of Jerusalem, the question of God's promise to Israel is at stake, and so too is the meaning of 'Messiah'. The Hebrew word means 'anointed' and chosen by God for a special purpose. A messiah could be a prophet, king, or even a warrior. The people of the Hebrew scriptures saw the messiah in different ways. Still today there are multiple understandings of the function of the messiah.

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1. Where do we see the creative movement of God stirring amongst us?
2. Where do we see the work of the Kingdom that the imperial powers of our day cannot destroy?
3. Where do we see the Messiah in the fact of collective and personal suffering?
4. What does it mean, in specific concrete terms to proclaim the good news of Jesus, the Messiah in our families, our communities, our work, our nation and our world?

Take home Message