

Timothy J. Grassi

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) 2020

I was thinking, this Gospel passage really tells us a lot about how our Catholic heritage began. It all started with the story recounted in this text when Jesus renamed Simon, "Rocky" and gave him the keys to the Kingdom. Actually he called him *Cephas*, an Aramaic nickname meaning rock. Its Greek counterpart is *Petros* which also means rock. So, on that day at Caesarea Philippi about 20 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, Simon, as he was known to his fishing buddies and his family, got a new name -- Rocky. Rocky was the big one, bigger than the boxer by that name: Marciano or the character Sylvester Stallone played in the movie called *Rocky* and all its sequels. I can just hear him calling the other disciples with a tough Brooklyn street kid accent, "Hey you'se guys, let's go get some fish." Probably not the reality of how it was, but this is one of the 2 places where Peter's position of leadership is spelled out more clearly than anywhere else. The other place is in St. John's Gospel where Jesus tells St. Peter after the Resurrection: "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep." Today's Gospel shows the position of St. Peter in relation to the other Apostles and this underlies our belief that after Christ, the Holy Father is chief shepherd and head of the Catholic Church. His role is to be the visible representative of Christ. This doesn't mean he has perfectly represented Christ at all times in history, but that is still the position

he holds. He has the final word on any issue relating to the Church. The keys Jesus said He would give to St. Peter symbolize this authority. Those keys Jesus spoke of were not buried with St. Peter and that position of authority did not end when St. Peter died. It was passed on to his 265 successors. St. Matthew made a big deal of this issue in his gospel because he wanted to emphasize that this was not just a personal favor that Jesus was giving to St. Peter, but that the leadership position of St. Peter would remain as part of the structure of the followers of Jesus. This is why the Catholic Church has survived for over 2000 years. It is established by Christ on the Rock, St. Peter and all his successors, and the “gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.” All of this makes the question Jesus asks all the more important for each one of us: “But who do you say that I am?” This really is the most important question of our lives, “Who do you say Jesus is?” How we answer this question will determine how each of us relates to Him. Is He someone worth our time on Sunday or even during the week? Is He someone we can trust? Is He someone who loves us, forgives us, wants only the best for us? Is He someone who has the authority to tell us how to live, what we should do, what we may not do? Is He someone we look forward to spending eternity with? It’s easy to SAY, Jesus is the Savior, Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus is the Son of God, or as we say week after week: “God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, one in being with the Father.” But, if we say these things,

the real question is, has our mind connected with our heart to the extent that we live for Jesus and not for ourselves? When Jesus first asked the Apostles the question they could tell Him what others said about Him, and we can also say what others have said about Him, and that's a good start, but have we moved beyond what others have told us, to actually KNOW Jesus in a personal way? Would Jesus say to you that you know Him in a way that "has not been revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by the Heavenly Father?" My point is that we have got to move beyond just hearsay in our relationship with Jesus. We need to confess with our lips that Jesus is the Messiah, Lord, and Son of God and we need to live for Jesus and not for ourselves so that we will be saved for freedom, purity, holiness, love, peace, joy, and eternal life. In other words, we need to accept Jesus on His terms, not our terms. Are we willing to be crucified with Christ? Is the life that we are living no longer our own? Have we lost our life for Jesus? Do we merely go to church or are we "churched" by Jesus' standards? Two of the most significant things that happened in my life that helped me answer the question, "Who do you say that I am?" was, number 1, I brought a pocket size NT to work with me each day and started reading it during my lunch hour. The second thing was I went to Perpetual Adoration once a week a 5AM for one hour. On the surface, I was always a faithful Catholic, insofar as I went to Mass each morning before work, I prayed the Rosary, I was involved in the Church and I did many

other things, but it was really when I started to get to know Jesus, not just ABOUT Jesus, but really get to KNOW Jesus through the Scriptures and the Eucharist that I was able to formulate a better answer to the Gospel question. The bottom line is this, there are no shortcuts to answer the question. It requires that we work to make the journey from knowing ABOUT Jesus to honestly coming to KNOW Jesus. That journey is what we call “prayer.” It’s through prayer that we will hear the words, “For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Heavenly Father.”