

Twelfth Sunday of Ordinary Time
June 19-20, 2010 – Cycle C

“A Fisher of Men”

Preface: The information in the following homily will be useful when you, your neighbors and friends are talking about why we Catholics so deeply respect the role of St. Peter, which is lived out in the role of the pope. When you are having your afternoon pickles and tea you will have some scripture quotes to help you. The following homily has a number of scripture citations.

The most important Apostle, most significant Apostles is St. Peter. My statement is not based on hearsay, that is, unsubstantiated information. My comment is based on the teaching of scripture. Our knowledge of St. Peter, his life, personality and death is chiefly derived from the four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistle to the Galatians. There are also two epistles attributed to St. Peter.

According to the Gospel written by John 1: 44, Peter was a native of Bethsaida, a town near Lake Tiberias, also known as the Sea of Galilee [John 1: 35-42]. St. Andrew, brother of Peter, introduces Peter to Jesus. Jesus gives Peter an Aramaic name equivalent to the Greek word Petros. It is Cephas. Both words mean “rock.”

Peter and Andrew are fishermen. But Jesus commands Peter to follow as a “fisher of men.” [Matthew 5: 19-20].

Peter is described as belonging to a smaller inner group of disciples, the twelve, the Twelve Apostles, and within that group a core group of three, Peter, James, and John. The core group of Peter, James, and John witness the raising of Jairus’s daughter [Mt. 9: 18-26]; the Transfiguration [Mt. 17: 1-8]; and they witness the Agony in the Garden [Mt. 26: 37].

In all of the lists of the Apostles, Peter is named first although it was Andrew who knew Jesus first.

[See Matthew 10: 2, Mark 3: 16, Luke 6: 13-16, and Acts 1: 13].

We call this firstness “primacy”. The primacy of St. Peter continues through the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, the pope.

In today’s gospel according to Luke [9: 18-24], the central passage of the gospel reading is called the “confession of Peter.” The word confession here means a profession. It’s Peter’s profession of faith and belief in Jesus who is Christ (the anointed one of God, Saviour, Redeemer Messiah, Son of God). Peter’s profession of faith in Jesus is also found in Mark 8: 27-30 and Matthew 16: 16. In Matthew’s account (16-18) the Lord Jesus adds the words, “You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church.” The passage (Matthew 16: 18 and following) also includes the power to bind and to loose in heaven and on earth through the power of the keys, the keys of the kingdom of God.

St. Peter and St. John are entrusted with the preparations for the Last Supper. During the Last Supper, the Lord Jesus reaffirms the pre-eminence of Peter by praying for Peter [Luke 22: 31]. And while Peter boasts that he will never abandon the Lord Jesus, Jesus predicts a threefold denial [Matthew 26: 33 f.]. After the resurrection St. Peter is made to profess his love in Jesus, three times, at the Sea of Tiberias/Galilee and receives a charge from Jesus to feed His lambs and sheep. [John 21: 15-19].

After the Ascension Peter immediately exercises leadership to help choose a replacement for Judas [Acts 1: 15-22].

On the day of Pentecost it is St. Peter who is preaching and the first of the Apostles to cause miracles in the name of Jesus [Acts 2: 14-41 and 3: 1-10]. Even Peter's shadow heals the sick [Acts 5: 15].

Peter leads the Council of Jerusalem along with James [Acts 15: 7-11] and help to formulate a compromise, to open the Church to Gentiles.

Peter becomes founder of the Church in Antioch and ordains Ignatius of Antioch to continue his ministry. Peter moves to Rome, founds the Church there and is followed by Paul. [See Romans 15: 20-22].

The third bishop of Rome, successor to Peter, was Clement, pope/bishop in the year 96 ad. Clement wrote many letters. In the letter titled, I Clement, chapter 5, Clement claims both Peter and Paul as outstanding heroes of faith, who founded the Church of Rome, exercised special authority, and started Episcopal succession, that is, they ordained Bishops to take their place. The biblical scholar and theologian, Origen of Alexandria (185-254 ad) tells us that Peter requested to be crucified upside down.

This was done under the Emperor Nero in 64 ad. Peter's request to be crucified upside down grew out of his sense of unworthiness to be crucified right-side up like Jesus. There could be only one Jesus and one crucifixion like that of Jesus.

St. Peter is noted by historians and scripture scholars as the source of information behind the gospel of St. Mark. St. Mark's gospel is the oldest synoptic gospel and the oldest of all four gospels. The words that describe events, where St. Peter is included, are some of the oldest used in the gospel of Mark.

When the prophet Zachariah, our first reading, prophesied the suffering of the Messiah, who is from the House and lineage of David, Zachariah is pointing to Jesus, known by St. Peter, denied by St. Peter, and loved by St. Peter. When St. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, is speaking of the inclusion of Jews and Greeks, that is, the inclusion of the Jews and Gentiles, in the plan of salvation, by baptism

into Jesus Christ, Peter was there, part of the process of including all humanity in that plan. And in the gospel it is Peter who reveals the true, divine nature of Jesus. [Luke 9: 18-21].

For more on the role of St. Peter and the Papacy, note the Council of Chalcedon 451 AD and Pope Leo I.

So we pray: Lord Jesus, the leadership of Peter is still with us, exercised in the ministry of Pope Benedict. Bless Pope Benedict and help him keep the Church together. Help him to keep its teaching pure and our practices true to Jesus as St. Peter did. We pray through Jesus who lives forever and ever. Amen.

Rev. A.J. Geraci
St. Paul Church
Yellow Springs, OH

