

Twenty First Sunday A

Dear friends, Certain moments or experiences in our life affect profoundly the rest of our life. These are called peak moments or peak experiences. The Gospel reading of today presents a peak experience in the life of St Peter – his declaration of the identity of Jesus. I would like to highlight four things that we can learn from this peak experience:

1. Jesus wants our personal response

Jesus first asked the disciples what other people thought about him. They said, John the Baptist, Elijah, (Jeremiah) etc. Then he asked them: “Who do you say that I am?” In other words, “Who am I for you?”

Most of us are Christians today because we were born of Christian parents who brought us up in their faith. It was their choice, rather than ours. But the question is: today, why do we want to be Christians? Jesus asks each one of us, “Why are you following me? Who am I for you personally?” We may know many things about Jesus which we have heard from others or from the books we have read, etc. However, that is not sufficient. He wants to know, “Who do you say that I am? Who am I for you?”

2. We need God’s Help to Know Who Jesus is

When Peter declared that “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,” Jesus praised Peter. But then he said that Peter did not come to this awareness through human means, “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly father”. Peter is a beneficiary of God’s revelation.

If we approach Jesus with our human resources alone, we will only arrive at conclusions arrived at by the Jews – that he is a prophet, a teacher, a healer. The real identity of Jesus has to be made known to us by God. For this, we have to remain open to be surprised by God.

3. We grow in our life of faith gradually

Peter made a very solemn profession of faith and Soon after being named ‘rock’, Peter misunderstood the nature of Jesus’ mission. He expected a triumphant Messiah. But Jesus would be a suffering messiah. During Jesus’ passion, Peter denied him thrice!, But the resurrection experience would change all that. Peter grew in his faith gradually, with many ups and downs, until he became mature enough to lay down his life for Jesus. Our own journey of faith may not be much different.

4. Faith bestows on you the privilege to serve

When Peter made the profession of faith Jesus entrusted him with the privilege or duty of leading the Church. A faith that does not express itself in service, a faith that does not do justice is a very weak faith, shallow faith. The Letter of James 2:17 says “Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

But why does God choose people with faults and foibles as leaders?

Jesus gives Simon a new name and a responsibility, or mission: Peter/Rock; and as the foundation for the Church. What kind of a foundation was Peter? A man who denied him three times, and after the resurrection, Peter could think of nothing more productive to do than to return to his fishing boat and nets. Twenty years later, he withdrew from table fellowship with some Christians because they were Gentiles. By nature, Peter was not rock! but the weak and human Simon became rock when he was open to divine revelation (“Blessed are you, Simon”), and when Jesus prayed for him (“Peter, I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail”). After Pentecost, Peter fearlessly proclaimed the gospel. He was imprisoned, tried, tortured, forbidden to preach... he did not stop preaching! Through grace, Peter became rock. There is something of Simon in all of us. We misunderstand Jesus’ mission and words; we deny Jesus; we get engrossed in our career and work... Yet God keeps choosing us, with and despite our weaknesses, and strengthens us to be his church. He perfects us in weakness. We will be rocks when we recognize our radical need for God and his grace.

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