

Homily 21 Sunday (A)

27 August 2017

Readings: Is 22:19-23; Ps 137; Rom 11:33-36; Mt 16:13-20

“But you, who do you say I am?” “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

We’re all familiar with this great Confession of Peter. And we are all familiar with Jesus’ reply: *“You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church.”* This is the very bedrock of what it means to be a Catholic, to be sons and daughters of Peter. But what about the very last bit? What do you make of that? In the final verse of the gospel it states: *Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.* What on earth does that mean?

There are three things today that I am asking you to pray for and to engage with – the Sunday School for families preparing for First Holy Communion, the Confirmation Programme which this year is going to be centred on the Easter Vigil, and the Journey in Faith both for new Catholics and for established Catholics.

We all need to hear that question, over and over: *“But you, who do you say I am?”* We all need to be challenged, from the seven-year-old child preparing for First Holy Communion to the ninety-year-old parishioner, from the brand new Catholic to the priest and the bishop. Our religion has got to be real. Our religion has got to be personal. *“But you, who do you say I am?”*

“You are Christ, the Son of the living God.” That’s our core message. That’s our evangelisation. All our programmes starting this Autumn are designed to reinforce, to renew, to reinvent this fundamental of our faith.

“You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church.” The great insight of Catholicism is that believing in Jesus and believing in the Church is fundamentally the same thing. Believing in Jesus means being part of Jesus, binding and loosing, continuing the work of reconciliation.

So, what about the last bit, the *strict orders not to tell anyone that he was the Christ?* None of our programmes that start this Autumn must force people to say things or believe things they can’t cope with. It’s about engaging people where they are, rather than presenting them with ready-made answers. The Catholic Faith is not a set of pre-packaged sound bites that need to be learnt by rote. The Catholic faith is a dialogue, a journey.

God is a mystery. *How rich are the depths of God – how deep his wisdom and knowledge – and how impossible to penetrate his motives or understand his methods!* What Jesus does for us is to bring us to the very threshold of this mystery.

But God still remains a mystery, impossible to understand.

With Jesus we can just begin to enter that mystery, to plumb those depths, to penetrate his motives.

Sometimes the children preparing for First Holy Communion are better at this than we are.

May we all make this journey in faith together, the journey into the very mystery of God's love.

To him be glory for ever! Amen

Fr Michael