

21st Sunday, Year A. (Isaiah 22:19-23; Rom 11:33-36; Mt 16:13-20)

Christ chose Peter to be the chief shepherd of his flocks. Though Peter had strength, he was outstandingly weak and fragile. We like St. Peter are merely earthenware jars. Though we fall sometimes, Christ gives us the strength to get up and go on.

The Gospel shows that the primacy of Peter was not something that was invented by the Church later on. It went right back to the beginning, yes, to the mind and will of Christ himself. Peter is one of the most interesting character in the Gospel. It is clear that he had glaring weaknesses. In the Gospels, we see his ups and downs. Sometimes, he is very brave, other times he is very cowardly. Sometimes, he is like a rock; other times he is more like a jelly. He is almost too human. Certainly not our idea of a saint, or even an ideal person to be the head of the Church that Christ founded, the holy Roman Catholic Church.

It is interesting to see how Jesus helped him to grow from strength to strength. He was a man who was willing to lay down his life for Christ and eventually did just that by his death in Rome.

Jesus' choice of Peter shows that he believed in him. We all need people to believe in us to help us grow. It is hard to believe in ourselves if no one does believe in us. The papacy through successive Popes and councils have traced its origin and title deeds to the unique commission given by Jesus to Peter. Hence, Peter remains the chief of the apostles of all ages. He was martyred in Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero. Information about Peter's life and career in the primitive church are all contained in the new testaments, especially the gospels and the Pastoral Epistles. This source is supplemented by some ancient and reliable traditions.

Jesus never spoilt Peter. That would have been to ruin his chance of ever growing up. The thread which runs right through their relationships was love. Peter knew that Jesus loved him. Love is the climate within which people can grow. This was the rock in Peter's life.

We can imagine that Peter made such a good leader. Good leaders are aware of their own weaknesses and fragilities. The experience of denying Jesus rid Peter of pride and blind reliance on his own resources. At the time, it enabled him to understand the weakness of others.

Peter's story is our story too. We too blow hot and cold. Sometimes we are strong, at other times we are weak. Without a warm relationship with Christ, we are only on the fringes of Christianity. We are like someone talking about love when compared with someone who is actually in love.

Each of us has got high and low moments. We must not let our low moments keep us down. We must also draw encouragement and strength from our high moments. While we must not forget our weak side, we must try to act out our strong side. The Lord smile on us in our good moments and upholds us in our low moments. Better to accept and celebrate what a person has than brood over what he/she has not. Jesus brought out the best in Peter. Jesus saw the good in him and brought it out.

It seems certain that Peter spent his closing years in Rome. Although the NT appears silent about it, it is supported by 1 Peter 5:13. Babylon is a code-name for Rome. To early writers like Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Irenaeus, it was common knowledge that he lived and died in Rome.

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