

Canon Philip Dyson, Homily notes:
St Peter & St Paul, 29th June 2021

First reading: Acts 12:1-11 'Now I know the Lord really did save me from Herod'. Psalm: 33(34):2-9 R: From all my terrors the Lord set me free. Second reading: 2 Timothy 4:6-8,17-18 'All there is to come now is the crown of righteousness reserved for me'. Gospel: Matthew 16:13-19 'You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church'.

Peter's confession of faith is a turning point in the ministry of Jesus.

The setting is important. Caesarea Philippi was in the far north, in Syria, then a pagan place. It was the site of various temples and shrines dedicated to pagan gods, ranging from the Syrian god Baal, to Pan, the Greek god of nature. In the midst of the city was a great white temple built by Herod and dedicated to the 'divinity' of Caesar, hence its name. Remnants of all are still there. The area today we know as the Golan Heights.

It is in this market place of gods and temples that Jesus asks the questions of his disciples, 'who do people say, and who do you say I am. Peter, quick as a flash answers 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus blesses the fisherman's faith and bestows on Simon a new name 'rock.' Peter's faith is the rock that will be the foundation of the Church. Peter is then entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the mission to proclaim the mercy and forgiveness of God.

It is important to understand that the essence of Christianity is that it is not primarily a philosophy, or a system of ethics or a religious ideology. It is a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The question Jesus asks is asked of us every day. Every decision we make is ultimately a response to the question 'who do you say I am?'

Paganism, pantheism, lack of belief surrounds us all today. As does persecution. I read only yesterday of 2 catholic churches totally burnt out in Canada. Of a large stone cross smashed in India, and a Hindu symbol replacing it. Christians in very many places in fear to go to church or perhaps even be known as Christian.

The two pillars of our church, Peter and Paul, early martyrs, remind us that our love for family and friends, our dedication to justice, our commitment to high moral standards, our effort towards reconciliation and forgiveness, our acts of kindness and charity declare most effectively our belief in Jesus as Messiah & Redeemer.

Jesus entrusts to Peter and his fledgling church the 'keys of the kingdom' his gospel of compassion, justice, forgiveness and hope to all. That continues to be handed on.

We have Peter, Pope Francis; who continues, as his predecessors did, to hand on the basics of our faith; our hope, our love, as we reveal God's kingdom in our midst, by our everyday efforts to heal divisions, lift up the broken hearted and abused as we let loose the hope of God's mercy and forgiveness in this time and place in 2021

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