

Dear Friends,

Jesus has returned to Jewish territory. Traveling with his disciples he is in Caesarea Philippi, about twenty miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Caesarea Philippi is filled with temples to pagan gods, including a temple built by King Herod dedicated to the “divinity” of Caesar. Here, surrounded by these sites, Jesus first reveals his plans and hopes for his Church.

In one sense we could say that Jesus set up the apostles, specifically Peter, by asking what people were saying about him. Some saw Jesus as John the Baptist reincarnated; others believed Him to be the long-awaited prophet Elijah who was to return to Israel or perhaps as Jeremiah. Peter, though, had been given the gift of faith, declaring Jesus to be the Messiah.

In response to his declaration of faith Jesus bestows on Peter a new name, “**Rock**,” a sign that Peter’s faith will be the foundation for Jesus’ Church. Peter is entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven and with the mission to bring sins to consciousness and to proclaim to sinners the love and forgiveness of God.

Jesus’ question to Peter and the eleven is also asked of us. Throughout our day – in all we say and do - we are asked to answer the question, “*Who do you say I am?*” Often Catholics and other Christians separate our faith identity from the rest of our lives, categorizing or compartmentalizing our faith, our work, our family, school and recreation time. Our faith in Jesus is meant to permeate all aspects of our lives. Our faith, our love of God, is meant to be seen in our love for family and friends, in the way we conduct ourselves at work, in school on a soccer, football or band field, on a drama stage, in the way we reach out and care for others, in the way we speak about others, in the steps we take towards reconciliation and forgiveness, in our acts of kindness and in our commitment to the highest moral and ethical standards.

Peter is the first among the twelve to understand Jesus’ identity, and even though he will still make mistakes, Jesus has confidence in him. Jesus has confidence in us as well. Though we may not be perfect, we still possess what it takes to reveal the living God to others.

In a homily to young people Pope Francis remarked: “*You are the heirs of a great testimony, a precious witness to Christ. He is the light of the world; he is the light of our lives!*” We, too, are heirs of a great testimony, and as such we have a responsibility to share our inheritance with others. May we see every moment of our day as an opportunity to answer Jesus’ question “*Who do you say I am?*” May we recognize every time and place as an opportunity to set people up to recognize the light of Christ’s love for them, the power of Christ’s presence in them.

Peace and blessings,
Fr. John