

Homily of Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2020

Isaiah 22:19-23; Psalm 138:1-3, 6, 8; Roman 11:33-36; Matthew 6:16:13-20

A daughter always complained to the father about one problem or another. One day her father took her to the kitchen and put three pots on the stove; first pot, a potato; second pot, an egg; and third pot, coffee. The three pots were left to boil for a while. He removed the pots from the fire and put the potato in a plate, the egg in a plate, and the coffee into a cup. He asked the daughter, "Touch the potato and tell me what you observe?" She touched and said, "Before, the potato was hard, but now it is soft." The father took off the shell of the egg and told her to touch the egg and say her observation. She touched and said, "Usually, the egg would have been in liquid form but it has hardened." The father said, "What do you observe about the coffee?" She said, "I perceive the sweet aroma." The father said to her, "The three faced the same challenge, the fire, the boiling water, but each came out of it differently. In Romans 5:3-4 St. Paul writes, "we also glory in our sufferings....." What matters about life is not what happens to a person; it is what the person makes out of the experience. The challenges either refine a person or break the person.

The first and second readings remind me a line in Mary's magnificat, "He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:51-52).

In the first reading, Shebna, the chief steward of King Hezekiah, was a wicked, deceitful, and proud man. It was said that he conspired with Assyria in an attack against Jerusalem. God sent Isaiah to prophesy his removal from office and to be replaced by Eliakim, a faithful and trustworthy servant of God. Isaiah prophesied God's blessings on Eliakim. He would take over the authority Shebna used to have. "He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the house of Judah. I will place the key of the house of David on [his] shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut; when he shuts, no one shall open. I will fix him like a peg in a sure spot ..."

The prophesy about Eliakim was, indeed, a prophesy about Jesus, "the Christ, the Son of the living God" as Peter professed. God replaced Shebna (the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Lawyers, the Scribes, the Chief Priests, and the old laws) with Jesus the Christ (the new Eliakim), and gave him the authority above all authorities. Jesus, then, passed the authority to Peter and the Catholic Church, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The Gospel of today helps us to understand the origin of the Catholic Church and the papacy. Jesus is the founder, and St. Peter is the first pope. It is only the Catholic Church that has Jesus as her founder. Every other Church traces its founder to a human being. The declaration and prophecy of Jesus in today's Gospel has kept the Catholic Church going for more than two thousand years of her existence, and the gates of hell have not been able to prevail over her. From her very beginning, as early as the time of the apostles to our generation, the Church has gone through strong wind and storm, earthquake and fire; yet the Church has continued to survive. Jesus' declaration and prophecy concerning the Church stand forever; which is to say, no matter what happens, the Catholic Church will remain till the end of time.

There is no doubt that the pandemic has caused so much loss and pain, and has tested and shaken our faith. Many times during this pandemic, we have reassured ourselves with the words of Jesus, "I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it." We know that the gate of Covid 19 Pandemic will not prevail against the Church, her leadership, and our faith. We pray that our faith may not fail or become weak as the pandemic drags on. We pray for the end of the virus, and the healing of those infected by it and other diseases. We pray that we will gather again in large numbers, and without fear, to glorify God. However, the loss and pain of the pandemic do not prevent us from seeing God's handiwork in the life of many individuals and parishes. We are witnessing the development and growth of various apostolates and ministries in many parishes, through the use of modern technology and other means and avenues. God has used the pandemic to reveal to us what the Church of the future will look like.

Also, the Gospel reading and the story invite us, as individuals, to reflect and see where God has used the pandemic to do something new in our life and our relationship with him.

In many countries and in many places, there are rulers and leaders, like Shebna, who are wicked, deceitful, proud, and corrupt, and who conspire against their own people. We pray for the end of their regime and leadership. We pray for the fulfillment of the words of Mary, that God, through his "inscrutable judgement," shows the might of his arm, disperses the arrogant of mind and heart, throws down those rulers and leaders from their thrones and positions, but lifts up the lowly. Amen.

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