

Thursday's Gospel: Raised up High

Gospel for Thursday in the 18th Week of Ordinary Time, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 16:13-23*)

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me,

Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.”

Commentary

When Jesus asks the Twelve who they think he is, Peter speaks out boldly: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” With his answer, Peter seems to take precedence over the others. Jesus tells him that he is not expressing a merely human conclusion: “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” Perhaps Peter himself didn’t understand the full scope of his confession of faith. In any case, he has been able to see beyond “flesh and blood” and becomes the rock upon which Christ’s Church will be built.

Christ's praise seems to raise Peter to a great height. Yet shortly afterwards, when Jesus makes clear that his messianic mission involves humiliation and death, Peter is unable to understand our Lord's words. Furthermore, with naivety and arrogance he even begins to rebuke Jesus. He seeks to enclose Christ's greatness within the limits of his own human concepts. And as a result he receives a harsh wake-up call: "Get behind me, Satan!"

When Peter acts out of merely human outlook, he falls and becomes an obstacle to God's plans. But when Peter lets himself be moved by grace, he is raised to great heights and given a deep knowledge of God.

What happened to Peter can also happen to us. Sometimes it seems that we see everything clearly, that all the pieces in our Christian life fit together perfectly, and that we are

even able to give light to others. And we are filled with gratitude for the light God has given us. But if we aren't watchful, and begin to have excessive trust in our own ideas and opinions, we can collapse. And then we begin to reason with a simply human perspective. We are unable to understand God's plans, and with our complaints we seem to be trying to correct our Lord, as Peter did.

In one of his letters, Saint Josemaría used the image of dust that is raised up in the air. When the wind begins to blows, the dust is raised on high and may even seem to be golden when it reflects the sun's rays. The same thing happens in our own lives. Although we may often strongly sense our own little worth, when we let the breath of the Holy Spirit move us we can rise very high. When we are humble and our heart is sincerely open to what God wants, we will be raised up to the heights of

the life of faith, and reflect God's light for the people around us.

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