

February 22: Chair of Saint Peter

Gospel for February 22nd, feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 16:13-19*)

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 gates of hell 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.”

Commentary

Each bishop exercises his ministry throughout his diocese, sitting in the Chair of the cathedral and presiding in the place of God the Father.^[1] The feast of the Chair of Saint Peter commemorates the fact that Jesus made Simon and his successors in

Rome the rock on which he built his Church. Matthew's Gospel today presents us with the scene of Peter's profession of faith in Christ's divinity and the promise of his primacy in the Church.

Jesus was entering Caesarea Philippi when he asked his disciples "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" This expression implies that his divinity is linked to a human face (cf. *Dan* 7:10-14). At the same time, it evokes the figure of the suffering Servant in Isaiah (cf. *Mt* 20:28). When Jesus asks them who they think He is, Peter responds: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The book of Samuel announced a descendant of David whom God would treat as his son (cf. *2 Sam* 7:14). David promised to build a temple for God. Jesus announces another temple, the Church: "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 gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Jesus makes another promise to Peter: “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.” The prophet Isaiah had announced that the key to the house of David would be placed on the shoulders of the steward of the royal palace: as the king’s representative, he opened and closed the administrative life of the people every day (cf. *Is* 22:22). Jesus opens the doors of Heaven; as the new David, he has “the key of David” (*Rev* 3:7).

In a later passage, Matthew tells us that the scribes and Pharisees closed the doors of Heaven to men (cf. *Mt* 23:13). Our Lord gives Peter and his

successors the power to forgive sins or withhold forgiveness. On the day of the resurrection, in an atmosphere of peace and joy, Jesus will institute the sacrament of Penance (cf. *Jn* 20:22-23).

The promise of Peter's primacy takes place on the border with the pagan world, now challenged by the universality of the Church. The New Testament shows how, over time, a fuller understanding of the Petrine ministry develops. From Rome, capital of the empire and place of Peter's martyrdom, the Holy Spirit spurs forward the evangelization of nations.

In St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI said on the feast of the Chair of Saint Peter in 2012: "the great bronze throne encloses a wooden chair from the ninth century, which was long thought to be Saint Peter's own chair. It

expresses the permanent presence of the Apostle in the Magisterium of his successors. Saint Peter's chair, we could say, is the throne of truth which takes its origin from Christ's commission after the confession at Caesarea Philippi. The magisterial chair also reminds us of the words spoken to Peter by the Lord during the Last Supper: 'I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren' (*Lk* 22:32)."^[2]

The bishop of Rome, "as successor of Peter, is the permanent and visible principle and foundation of unity" in the Church.^[3] We call him "Pope," a Greek term that means father. With filial affection, Saint Josemaría urged us to pray a lot for the Pope, whose paternity participates in that of God.^[4]

[1] Cf. Saint John Paul II, Apost. Exhort. *Pastores gregis*, October 16, 2003, no. 34.

[2] Benedict XVI, Homily, February 19, 2012.

[3] *Lumen gentium* , no. 23

[4] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*, December 8, 2020, no. 7.

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