

Homily August 26/27, 2017

21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

What is in a name? Are names important? Most of us are known by a first and last name. Our names identify who we are on earth. They identify our lineage, or with a title, perhaps our professional name. I personally can go by at least three names: Mark Robert Anthony Bortle, which is my given and confirmation name; Mark Bortle, PE (Professional Engineer) which is my professional secular name; or Deacon Mark Bortle which is my formal church title. All of these names identify who I am. Just as I am identified by a number of names, Jesus was also known by a number of names.

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Jesus asked this question to his disciples nearly two thousand years ago. They answered Him by saying, “John the Baptist”, “Elijah”, or “Jeremiah”, or one of the prophets. Peter’s response was “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied to Peter by saying “Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.” Peter finally ‘got it’ that Jesus truly was the Son of God. What would any of us have said if we were with the disciples when Jesus asked this question? Would we have identified Christ as who he really was? Would we be willing to admit today that Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God? Or would we not be able to notice His Divine lineage today; as our eyes, ears, and minds are clouded by the noise of today’s society?

In this same Gospel reading, Christ gave Simon a new name along with his new authority. Christ renamed him Peter (which in Greek was “Petros”) and then said upon this rock (Greek *petra*) I will build my church; our church. In Aramaic, the word *kepha* was the equivalent of the Greek *Petros* and meant “a sizeable rock”. Which was and is, very appropriate. Christ laid the foundation of the Church on a sizeable rock, one that could weather the storms throughout the ages. Christ anointed Peter, a simple fisherman, as the first leader of the church, essentially our first pope; from which we can trace the papal lineage (our apostolic succession) down through the ages to the current Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis. No other Christian denomination can trace its historical lineage back to this time, nearly two thousand years ago.

Aren't we all glad that Christ founded our church on a solid rock with Peter as the first vicar of Christ and with the twelve Apostles helping to shore up the foundation, a strong and sturdy foundation to build the Church. This foundation of the Church is also cited in Revelations 21:14 "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them, the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

Christ gave Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. The keys that were given to Peter were not the keys to a palace on Earth, but were a symbol of Peter's service and authority in the name of Christ as the new leader of Christ's Church on earth. These keys to the Kingdom of heaven are so much more powerful than any earthly, physical keys we own today.

In this same passage, Christ continued to state that "whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." These powerful words to Peter gave him enormous authority. These terms, at the time of Christ were well known to the Jewish people. Essentially the word "bind or bound" signified Peter's authority to teach and to render binding decisions for the church and the word "loose" gave Peter the authority to forgive others of their sins. Our bishops today still maintain the same Petrine authority as teachers of their local church (our diocese) and our priests through the authority of the Trinity can forgive us of our sins through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Are we still able today to hear those words from Jesus as clear as they were heard that day when he spoke to the twelve? What would we respond if we would hear Christ asking us today; "Who do you say that I am?" Would we be able to shout loudly so that all can hear that we truly believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God? Or would we only be able to whisper these words to our closest friends or in the confines of the church. Can we be bold in our response to the Lord? "Who do you say who I am?"

Deacon Mark Bortle