

Reflection

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Today is called the 21st Sunday in ordinary time. We will have 33 Sundays called “ordinary” this year. “Ordinary?” We know what the term means liturgically but in what we call real life, it’s another thing.

We’re living in strange times. Perhaps people of every era say that, but this is us, and these are our times. We are praying this morning, electronically connected through an empty Chapel; but *spiritually* connected with everyone else online or within the reach of our prayer.

We are acutely aware of the “extraordinary” in our lives: the COVID-19 pandemic; political conventions—one concluded, one to come; schools, teachers, parents and children facing the challenge of opening or not opening; the intertwining issues of racism, unemployment and a faltering economy. Natural and man-made crises are constantly in the news. We have a growing awareness of issues of mental and emotional health as well as physical well-being that arise in this context.

That is why we are here. Despite the absence of a Eucharistic celebration; despite the absence of a gathered community; we know in faith that we are in the company of the One who makes the difference and we are walking in the company of one another in spirit.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus is walking with his disciples, their ordinary mode of travel. Walking can be a good time for conversation—sometimes profound conversation. He is walking, talking thoughtfully with the disciples. They have distances to travel and they have time.

Jesus asks, in a seemingly casual manner: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They respond with what they are hearing in the towns they pass through. People are saying that you are John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets. That’s what they have been hearing. People obviously have a sense that there is someone unusual, out of the ordinary here.

As the conversation progresses, Jesus moves on to his *real* question for the disciples: “Who do *you* say that I am?” Peter leaps in with his own response: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter always seems to have a response ready. Sometimes we wonder if he realizes what he has said, but Jesus praises his response, a response provided by his Father. For this, Peter is named “Rock”—a play of words on his name, and on his future role. And he is given the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

Many of you have seen, in person or in pictures, the two great statues in St. Peter’s Square. Paul holds the sword of the word; Peter the keys of the Kingdom. We are centuries away from the words being spoken, but the symbols continue to speak. Both

are needed. The words of the Gospel unlock for us the reign of God; they are the keys to understanding.

I marvel at the fact that more than 2,000 years after that walking conversation between Jesus and Peter, we continue to be rooted in those words and to build on the foundation begun there. "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." There was the promise ... the beginning, a task to begin.

Peter was the human builder given a remarkable task. But, no doubt, Peter himself would agree with the words of the hymn: "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ the Lord. ..."

The mystery of it all remains, in depth, a mystery. Paul expressed it in the words of our second reading from Romans:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.
How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!
For who has known the mind of the Lord
Or who has been his counselor?
Or who has given to the Lord anything that he may be repaid?
For from him, and through him, and for him are all things.
To him be glory forever. Amen

In the times of Peter and Paul, and in our own times, questions and the search for answers continue. It is a time for us to continue those walking (or sitting) conversations, pondering with Jesus, a similar question:

Who are you as we walk through this ordinary time together?