

Peter: Fisherman to Follower
BUILT ON THE ROCK

Saturday, October 17

Reading: Matthew 16:13-28

Matthew 16:15 *"But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?"* **16** *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."* **17** *Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven."* **18** *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

Jesus and His disciples have journeyed into the more Gentile-influenced territory on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. It is here in Caesarea Philippi, with its temples to pagan gods, that Jesus asks them this most important question: "Who do you say that I am?" While the crowds have mixed and erroneous ideas about His identity, Peter gets it right! His time with Jesus has confirmed to him that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus blesses Peter because his response was not only correct but had come by direct revelation from God the Father. While Peter is a little stone (*petros*) in the Church, Jesus Himself is the rock (*petra*) or boulder upon which He will build His church. Peter understood what Jesus was saying for he would later write: "As you come to Him, the living Stone, rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house..." (1 Peter 2:4-5).

Just as the Church is not built on Peter, so it is not Peter or any human source that would build the Church. Jesus promised "I will build MY church!" That is the only reason "the gates of Hades will not overcome it." The keys to the kingdom refer to the authority of God's Word. It is what determines truth, not Peter or any other human being. The tense in Greek is better translated "will have been" bound or loosed in heaven. In other words, the judgment has already been determined in heaven and believers merely stand in agreement with God.

Now for the first time Jesus reveals the full plan to His disciples - His rejection, death, burial, and resurrection. For Peter, this idea is out of the question. Without knowing it, Peter is doing Satan's work by trying to stop Jesus from going to the cross. Only moments before Jesus had said, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah", but now He rebukes with "Get behind Me, Satan!" Peter was blinded to God's plan and was responding out of human desires. Jesus reminds Peter and all believers that those who follow Him must "deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me."

LESSON ONE: The Catholic Church cites this passage as proof that Peter was the first Pope and that the Pope has authority over all believers. However, we have seen that Jesus said the Church is built on Himself, not on Peter or anyone else. Why is it important to remember that Jesus is the final authority for the Church and believers in general?

LESSON TWO: Jesus reminds us that the Church (Greek *ekklesiá* – "called out ones") is not a building or organization. All those who have accepted Christ, in all countries, at all times, are part of His Church. He will continue to build it until He returns. Understanding this, would it not be better to fight "the gates of Hell" instead of fighting with each other? What does it mean for you to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus?