

Sermon for the Confession of St. Peter – Mark 8:27-35

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“And [Jesus] asked [Peter and His disciples], ‘But who do you say that I am?’ ...”

What people say reveals who they are. If you think about it, none of us really has the ability to conceal what’s in our hearts. No matter how stoic of a German we may be, what we believe and think will always come out in our actions or even on the tip of our tongues. And yet, we still try to cover up so much, don’t we? How many times have we pretended to forget something when we really hadn’t? How many times have we pretended that we didn’t mean something we said when we really did? How many times have we feigned shock and hurt because we had been misinterpreted when we hadn’t? Our Lord said, “It is what comes out of the mouth that defiles a man,” because the mouth reveals the heart.

If we can’t tell the truth in the simplest things; if we always color the facts, exaggerate, and edit; and if we act like we are better than we are; then our heart is black with sin and our mouth has shown it.

But that’s why today’s Gospel is especially “Good News” for us. Today our Lord asked St. Peter and His disciples a question: “Who do you say that I am?” Jesus didn’t ask Peter what he was doing, if Peter was improving the world, if he was trying hard at making a difference, or even if he was an honest man. Why? Because the Kingdom of God was not built upon the works of men. Neither did our Lord ask Peter what he believed, to see if he was rational and consistent, or to see if his theology was accurate. Because the Kingdom of God is not built on faith.

Our Lord asked Peter: “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter’s answer was not his own. Flesh and blood did not reveal it to him. The Spirit who hovered over the waters at the time of creation, the Spirit who descended upon our Lord in the form of a dove at His Baptism, this Spirit opened Peter’s lips. Out came the Word of God: “You are the Christ!” Upon this – the Word of God, this revelation of God’s love for us in His Son, on the lips of men, upon this truth, Christ builds His Church.

That’s the way God builds. What Peter couldn’t say, God said for him. God purified Peter from the inside out. He entered into Peter by His Word through Peter’s ear. Let’s be clear – Peter remained a sinner. At times he was a blowhard vowing death before he would allow the Messiah to die, but then cowardly denying Him in the very same evening. Other times he was pietistic and legalistic, trying to force his dietary laws upon free men. Even in today’s Gospel, just moments after the great confession of the Christ, Peter angrily rebuked Jesus for saying that the Christ must suffer many things and be killed. But even when Peter was a sinner – God still loved him, God still worked

through him. He entered into him by speaking the Word, and that Word in Peter opened Peter's lips. His lips were cleansed for confession. His mouth, by grace, declared God's praise: "You are the Christ!" That's the way God builds. He is the speaker and the architect. He even provides the material. He does for Peter what Peter could not do for himself. He gives Peter His Word.

And this is how He works in you also. Don't forget that even for all your sin, you are still baptized and you still hear the Word. The Father had declared you well-pleasing to Him. The Spirit Himself has descended upon you. The Son has made you His home. You make confession like Peter before you. You sing God's praise – the profound reality that God still intervenes in your life through grace. You are forgiven for Jesus' sake. You are His own. You are holy, righteous, and innocent. God has built you into His Church through His Word upon the lips of men.

By His grace we can say a lot of things about who Jesus Christ is. He is the prophet greater than Elijah and all other prophets. With John the Baptizer we proclaim that He is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World," even ours. He is the Ram caught in the thicket who dies in our place. He is the Suffering Servant with pierced hands and feet, surrounded by the bulls of Bashan. He is the Victor over death and the grave. He is the King who invites us to His celebration, to eat from what we did not plant or labor, and drink what we did not buy, without cost and without money.

What St. Peter confesses on this day by inspiration is not new, nor does it belong exclusively to him. "You are the Christ" embodies all of our hope and faith, and makes us who we are in the Lord. It's God's confession, and He gives it to you just as much as He gave it to Peter. It rises up from your heart, made pure by grace, through lips cleansed in Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. It's your confession. "Jesus is the Christ." And because He is and because He lives forever, so will you. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠

*This sermon (with slight modifications) was written by the Rev. D.H. Petersen in his book God With Us, pp. 173-75.*