

8. August 2024

"You are the Messiah"

Mt 16:13-19

When Jesus came into the district of Caesare'a 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 Eli'jah, 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 powers of death 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

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God".

Here is St Peter's decisive confession of faith, which is considered the hallmark of true faith.

The Lord mentions here what is the key to knowing His true identity: *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven".*

Prayer to the Holy Spirit is therefore essential, because recognising Jesus as the Son of God requires a supernatural enlightenment that comes from the Father Himself. The people of that time felt that there was something special about Jesus, and in their piety they believed that He was *"John the Baptist, others say Eli'jah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* But piety and human reasoning are not enough to arrive at the decisive conclusion that changes everything... And it is good that this is so, because then it becomes clear that faith is a gift of God.

Some will surely ask, if faith is a gift, why does not everyone receive it? The answer would be that faith is indeed a gift intended for everyone, but that it is not within our

capacity to understand who receives it. It is up to us, who make this profession of faith together with St Peter, to make people aware, through our witness in word and life, of this immense gift: our Heavenly Father sent His only Son into the world as the Messiah (cf. Jn 3:16). Who better to bear witness to this than the Holy Spirit, our divine teacher and friend? He is the ultimate witness (cf. 1 Jn 5:6-7)!

There are so many who are still waiting for salvation, although they may not even be aware of their thirst or have gone astray in their search. They do not yet know God's greatest gift, which is that He has given Himself to humanity.

This is where Peter, the rock on which the Church is built, must be standing firm and unwavering in this profession of faith. In fact, all the promises that the Lord makes to Peter are predicated on the unwavering confession of the Messiah. If Peter were to waver to the left or to the right and cease to testify to the world that Jesus is the only Saviour and Messiah, if he were not to turn from these erroneous ways, then the powers of hell would be given access to the Church and the authority given to him by God as the "rock" would be weakened or even disappear.

God forbid!

In this connection, I would like to quote a short passage from the author Vladimir Soloviev's "Brief Tale of the Antichrist". When the Antichrist - who is portrayed in this book as an emperor - had attracted a large number of Christians of various denominations to his side, there remained a small group who resisted. One of them was a 'starez' (as spiritual teachers are called in Russia). He said to the emperor (the Antichrist):

"Great Emperor! For us, the most precious thing in Christianity is Christ Himself: Himself and everything that comes from Him, for we know that in the Word made flesh dwells all the fullness of the Godhead. But also from you, O Sovereign, we would be ready to receive any gift, as soon as we recognise in your generous hand the blessed hands of Christ. Our clear answer to your question as to what you can do for us is this: confess before us now that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He has become flesh, that He rose from the dead and will return; confess Him, and we will receive you with love as a true forerunner of His glorious Second Coming".

But the Emperor did not make this profession of faith, and then the false prophet accompanying the Antichrist killed the Starez. Consequently, Pope Peter II, who also belonged to the group of those who had not gone over to the Emperor's side, recognised that this man was the Antichrist and pronounced the "anathema" on him.

Here is an essential aspect of the Petrine ministry: the public confession of faith, the confession of the true Saviour of humanity, and the rejection of all powers that would usurp the place of God.

This is very much needed today, and the clear language of the Church to point out and reject anti-Christian tendencies is often lacking. Indeed, such language has become practically absent. But when it is missing, the faithful are confused and miss this important element of the Petrine ministry.

Thank God, we can turn to the Holy Spirit, who is the first witness of the Messiah, the one who reminds us of everything the Lord said and did (cf. Jn 14:26). Then we will discover that there are still some in the Church's hierarchy who do not allow themselves to be carried away by the spirit of the times and continue to say things as they are. For example, it was reassuring to see that some in the hierarchy opposed the absurd intention proposed in *Fiducia Supplicans* to bless homosexual couples. Priests also cooperate with their bishops in this ministry of Peter. I encourage them to assume their responsibility to proclaim the Gospel without fear and to confess Jesus as the Messiah and only Saviour, with all that this implies. If many bishops, even in the highest circles of the Church, no longer speak and act with this clarity and take a different path, this is no reason to do the same. On the contrary! It is all the more reason to support the Church and the Petrine ministry with the testimony of truth, because without a clear confession of faith, the mission and thus the true identity of our Holy Catholic Church will be lost.