

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 16:13-20

Where is my faith? – even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness & darkness. – My God – how painful is this unknown pain. It pains without ceasing. – I have no faith. – I dare not utter the words & thoughts that crowd in my heart - & make me suffer untold agony. So many unanswered questions live within me – I am afraid to uncover them – because of the blasphemy – If there be God, - please forgive me.

As you can see, the person who wrote this was definitely someone struggling with faith. The person seems doubtful about the presence of God and experiencing emptiness and darkness in life.

This short writing is actually an excerpt from one of the private letters of Mother Teresa. In another letter she described additional tribulations of her spiritual emptiness. She wrote: “There is so much contradiction in my soul. Such deep longing for God, so deep that it is painful, a suffering continual, and yet not wanted by God, repulsed, empty, no faith, no love, no zeal,” . . .

“Souls hold no attraction. Heaven means nothing, to me it looks like an empty place. The thought of it means nothing to me and yet this torturing longing for God.”

It is obvious this pious saint who completely dedicated herself to the Lord experienced dark nights of the soul and struggled with doubt and human weaknesses all throughout her life. Her faith was not always perfect, it wavered, just like our faith sometimes. However, Mother Teresa continued to pray and asked for God's guidance, and the Lord helped her overcome her doubts of faith and led her to His heavenly kingdom.

Today's gospel is not about the strong and firm faith of Peter, rather, it is about the amazing work of God which led Peter to overcome his weakness.

Jesus asked Peter, "who do you say that I am?," and Peter answered Him, "you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." What a perfect profession of faith! Jesus, after having heard Peter's answer, bestowed a new name upon Simon. He gave him the name "Peter," which means "stone or rock." Then Jesus told Peter that would build His Church upon him.

"I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."

If we only consider this gospel passage, Peter seemed to have a strong faith in Jesus. We can easily think that Jesus built His Church upon Peter because he possessed such a firm faith in Jesus.

However, as we all know, even after this great profession of his faith, Peter denied his Lord three times after Jesus was arrested. He could not constantly maintain his firm faith when he came face to face with Jesus' passion and crucifixion. Peter was not a special or perfect person. Even when Jesus first met Peter and performed a miracle before him, Peter cowered in shame, and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." From the beginning, Peter did not always have a confident faith in Jesus and throughout his whole journey alongside Him, Peter probably doubted Jesus quite often.

However, Christ transformed Peter's faith and made him a firm foundation of His Church. Through his encounter with the resurrected Lord, Jesus led Peter to overcome his weakness in faith.

Our faith is weak. It is naturally weak because we are human beings and far from perfect. Throughout our spiritual journey, we sometimes doubt God's presence in our lives especially when: we suffer; when our lives are changed—sometimes forever—by tragic events; when we experience an

emptiness in our hearts; or when we experience our own “dark nights of the soul” like Mother Teresa. In these moments of unclarity, we need to remember that we are not the ones who make our faith firm and strong, it is God who does so. We need to rely on Him and ask Him to transform our faith. Yes, we will be tempted to despair and feel frustrated at times, but we need to trust in God and His work in our lives. Receiving the Eucharist is especially important when we go pass through dark nights of the soul, because we can encounter Christ and be transformed in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

My friends, when we are in times of trouble and experience dark nights of our own souls, may we remember St. Peter and Mother Teresa. God helped them to overcome their doubts of faith and made them models of firm faith, and He will also help *us* overcome ourselves and our lack of faith and lead us on to the path of light. He will transform us all and make us a firm rock of faith.