

Peter's Profession of Faith

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Mt 16:13-20

Ave Maria Catholic Church. Sunday, August 27, 2023. Fr. David M Vidal

“You are the Messiah (Christos), the Son of the living God.” (Mt 16:16)

Jesus hears Simon's profession of faith, and He looks into the soul of Simon. Simon speaks with all truth of the Father's work in his soul. The Father's work, by means of the Holy Spirit, reaches the soul of Simon so that he can say: “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” (Mt 16:16)

In other words, Simon's profession of faith has its origin in God. Jesus looks into Simon's soul. He seems to admire the work carried out by the Father through the Holy Spirit. Simon becomes a participant in the divine knowledge that the Father has of the Son.

And for this reason, Jesus tells Simon that this truth is not revealed by "flesh and blood". It is revealed to man only by “the heavenly Father,” (See Mt 16:17).

In the same way, God works in our interior.

God works in the interior of every human being, in our minds, consciences, and hearts. For this reason, Saint Augustine tells us that God is “*closer to us than our inmost being*,” (See St. Augustine, Confess. III, 6, II: CCL 27, 33).

God is the Creator, the *Giver of Life*. The book of Genesis reveals that *God formed man out of the clay of the ground [but] blew into his nostrils the breath of life*, (Gen 2:7). He is the author of our natural life.

God is also the Author of our spiritual life. Let us remember the conversation of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. In that dialogue, Jesus reveals that: “*God is spirit*” and that He is worshipped in spirit and truth. Only the Spirit can be “*closer to us than our inmost being*.” God is Spirit, and He is the author of our spirituality. He is the author of the supernatural life, a life of friendship with Him, the life that we received when we were reborn in Christ.

In this way, God is not only the *Giver of Life*, but He is also the *Sanctifier*. The Holy Spirit is the author of sanctity; the Holy Spirit aligns us with Jesus.

After Peter's profession of faith, Jesus praises him with these words: “*Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.*”

In many ways, the flesh is weak. In many ways, the flesh is limited. It cannot rise to the heights of heaven without God's grace. In addition to that, the flesh is also prompted to

deny what the Spirit teaches us. This is the struggle between the spirit and the flesh in our lives.

Unfortunately, the history of humanity shows that the action of God meets with the opposition of our human weakness.

And this opposition becomes rebellion by reason of that sin which takes possession of the human heart. Quoting the words of Saint Paul, "*The desires of the flesh are against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh*" (Gal 5:17).

In every human being, there exists a natural conflict because we are made up of both *body* and *spirit*. We are not only flesh and bones, and we are not purely spiritual either, like angels are. We have a body and a spiritual soul. Therefore, we share some aspects proper to material creatures, and we share some other aspects proper to spiritual creatures. However, in the plan of God, body and the spiritual soul are perfectly united, even though the conflict remains because the soul is not material, and the body is not spiritual.

But after original sin, this natural conflict becomes a struggle, a battle of tendencies between the "*spirit*" and the "*flesh*." And this struggle is a consequence of sin and at the same time, a confirmation of it. And this struggle is part of the everyday experience.

In his letter to the Galatians, Saint Paul presents this struggle: "*Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, drunkenness, revelry.*" And he adds: "*Enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, envy,*" (See Gal 5:19-21).

But to these evil works, St. Paul contrasts "*the fruits of the Spirit,*" such as "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*" (Gal 5:22f.).

Unfortunately, the resistance to the work of God in our interior not only takes place inside the human heart but is also extended to our society. This is the state of societies that want to remove God from their very foundations. Societies that want to ignore God or silence God. They fight for a world without God.

Saint Paul condemns this resistance and opposition with the words: "*The desires of the flesh are against the spirit.*"

Let us return to the image of Simon's profession of faith.

Simon was moved by the Spirit. Then, he became Peter. Simon professed that Jesus is the Son of God; then, Jesus declared that Peter is the rock on which He built His Church. Peter made his profession of faith in Jesus and this faith is the firm foundation of the People of God.

With Peter, we profess our faith in Jesus. This truth is not revealed by “flesh and blood.” It is revealed to us only by “the heavenly Father” (See Mt 16:17). This profession of faith leads us to live a life of sanctity and moves us to reject the works of the flesh.

Let us renew our profession of faith today and always. With our words as well as our actions, let us confess that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Amen