

**Homily 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday of OT Year A Is 22:19-23; Rom 11:33-36; Mt 16:13-20**

I don't think any of us would deny God the authority and power, to displace one master of an earthly palace and replace him with another, handing over to the new master, the authority of the old. It's not surprising that he would see fit, now and then, to exercise his supreme sovereignty over the world he created.

*What is surprising, if not absolutely shocking, is that he would one day see fit, to share his sovereignty with mere mortals, and hand over heavenly authority to human beings ... people no different, in body, mind, or spirit, than you and I. But that's exactly what Jesus did in the gospel today.*

The only begotten Son of God, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Holy Trinity, incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, empowered the man, the apostle Peter, to teach, preach, sanctify, heal, forgive, and govern in his name and on his behalf.

*Peter was given this authority preeminently, but his brother apostles, the first bishops, if you will, also had a share in exercising that authority, in the name and on behalf of Christ. You remember the gospel of John from the Easter season. Jesus appears to all the apostles hiding in fear behind locked doors.*

He breathes on them and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven, and whose sins you retain are retained." And the same authority has been handed over to all the popes, and bishops in communion with them, down through the millennia, all the way to today.

*Put another way, Jesus Christ has entrusted his Church with his Truth. The Church's shepherds have been charged to apply his Truth to life in this world for the good of all people.*

In a nutshell, their responsibility is to tell us what to believe and how to be holy. Our responsibility is to listen, understand, and act accordingly. In general terms, this is God's will for every member of the Body of Christ, and this is God's will for how his Church is to be Church.

*Before I get to why this is such a concern of mine today, I want to highlight part of the conversation between Jesus and Peter. Peter proclaims a definitive truth about Jesus; he professes an indisputable article of faith, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."*

Jesus replies, “Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.” In other words, it wasn’t the independent workings of Peter’s own mind and heart that enabled him to proclaim Jesus the Christ, but divine grace and inspiration.

*In just the same way, when the Church speaks a definitive truth about faith or morals to us, we can reply, “Blessed are you, Holy Mother Church, Body of Christ and Sacrament of Salvation, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but the Holy Spirit of God.*

Sisters and brothers, when the Church exercises her teaching authority to definitively state what’s right or wrong, good or bad, relative to human behavior, it’s not a bunch of mindless men making up random rules to make us miserable. It is God giving us his grace for our eternal well being.

*Definitive teachings of the Church are not to be regarded as suggestions, guidelines, or simply one set of options among many. They communicate to us concrete ways, we are to fulfill the will of God in this world. The Holy Spirit inspires these communications, and guarantees their authenticity.*

Okay, so why all the hullabaloo? Well, I’m a member of a prayer line made up of close to two hundred good-hearted people striving to be holy. A poem was shared that offended some folks because at the end, it portrayed God turning someone away from the pearly gates.

*In response, one person offered a quote from a book titled What the Modern Catholic Believes about Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. I’m going to share the quote and my response to it, because it’s a real-life event that well illustrates the issue at hand.*

That exchange has to do with judgment and purgatory, but those specifics aren’t my primary concern. This is: that those who fancy themselves “Modern Catholics” believe it’s okay not to believe, what the Church definitively believes and teaches, in favor of whatever they’d like to believe that makes more sense to them.

*They are effectively stripping the Church of her God-given authority, and assuming it for themselves, thereby becoming their own authority ... and that, brothers and sisters, is NOT okay. If, at anytime, now or in the future, you find yourself believing your own beliefs, over and against what the Church believes, come see me, and I’ll help you work through the differences.*

***So here's my exchange with the prayer line. First, the line from What Modern Catholics Believe: "I, for one, believe that God does not judge us, He is waiting with open arms for us. We judge ourselves, and the regrets we feel are our purgatory." Now, for my response ....***

This quote is essentially a heretical statement about God. God WILL judge, specifically Christ himself. He will judge each of us individually at the end of our lives, and he will judge humanity overall at the end of the world. This divinely revealed FACT is all over the scriptures, and it is in the deposit of faith that we profess every Sunday.

***The Nicene Creed says it this way, "He will come again in glory to JUDGE the living and the dead." The Apostles' Creed just a little differently: "He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty, from there he will come TO JUDGE the living and the dead."***

Shifting judgment of individual persons to themselves, and imagining that somehow what we modern people believe about the last things makes those realities become what we believe about them, is the height of human ignorance and pride, and another example of how modern society is making strides to set up a new god to worship, i.e. humanity itself.

***Frankly what "Modern Catholics" believe on their own about anything is irrelevant, inasmuch as what they believe is not grounded in God's truth, and inasmuch as they casually set aside the authoritative teaching of the Church, which itself is grounded in, and guided by the Holy Spirit.***

Heaven, hell and purgatory are realities created by God - they are not experiences we create for ourselves. The Church doesn't claim to know much about the details of these realms, other than that they exist, and that our fidelity to Christ and his Church plays a role, in how we might or might not experience them.

***But I can assure you, purgatory is not a reality that is created by the guilt we feel over our mistakes. It is, instead, a process created by God, through which he lovingly makes us ready, to live in perfectly loving union with him and each other for eternity.***

Might we feel some remorse over our failings during that process? Sure, but those feelings in and of themselves should not be put forth as the sum total of the experience of purgatory.

***The bottom line is that genuine faith calls us to believe in what God wants us to believe ... in what he has revealed about himself, about his Church, about us, about the world. We are not supposed to believe in what we imagine about these things, to make us more comfortable, or feel better about them. They are what they are, what God created them to be, and that should be good enough for us.***

Those "Modern Catholics" who go about creating and then living by their own creeds, which contradict the divine revelation of Scripture and Apostolic Tradition do themselves and others a grave disservice ... one that calls into question the genuineness of their communion with the Church, and one that Christ will surely ask them about, when they go before him to ***be judged by him*** one day.

**End of my response....        PAUSE**

***St. Paul exclaims to the Romans, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" Though his judgments be inscrutable and his ways unsearchable, in his love and mercy, he has revealed at least a glimpse of those things to us ... as much as we need for our salvation.***

Holy Mother Church is the herald he created and commissioned to proclaim his good news. Have we listened to her, learned from her, obeyed her, and loved her, for the greater glory of God?

***I pray that the answer is, or will ultimately be 'YES' for all gathered here ... for this is what it means to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, against which the netherworld shall NOT prevail.***