

=====

HOMILY NOTES FOR CCC EASTWOOD 27 AUG 2023

At this point of Jesus continuing journey which will lead him eventually to Jerusalem, we have been following him all the way from the south, all the way from his own baptism, all the way up through Samaria, through Galilee, and now he's at the top, the very top of Palestine. This is region of Caesarea Philippi, now an archeological park in the Golan Heights known today by the name Banias. There was a particular place noted historically as the place where there was a famous and popular shrine, to the Greek god PAN.

This Greek god Pan was one of those kind of naughty gods, leading people astray all the time. He used to play his flute to kind of entice good people away and into doing the kind of naughty things he was known for. And at the time of Jesus, his power had waned a bit, but there were still four great caves there in which Pan was worshipped.

It was here in this region of Caesarea Philippi that Jesus found himself alone with his disciples, after they had journeyed and been in many places with large crowd following them. Then Jesus asked them these two questions which some scripture scholars say marks the turning point in the ministry of Jesus. First – **“Who do people say the Son of Man is”**, and shortly after, **“But you, who do you say I am?”**

The first was not alarming as it was a kind of a public opinion popularity survey: **‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ Or ‘Who do people say I am?’** No sweat, that was readily answered: ‘Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah and other Jeremiah of one of the prophets.’ Well said as the disciples indicate that most people in Israel believe that Jesus is a prophet of Israel. But after hearing from several of his friends the gossip they had picked up around, he then framed a question that most would never dream of asking: **“But you, who do say I am?”** Most of them would have probably felt running for cover. It was Peter, who was rarely short of a word, piped up with a response that would fit any catechism: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus was so impressed with what came out of Peter’s mouth that he concluded that it could only have been inspired by God. In essence, Jesus replied: “Simon, son of Jonah, God bless you! You didn’t learn that from a book or a teacher. It was God who disclosed to you the secret of who I really am.”

Indeed, Jesus commends Simon Peter for this profession of faith, indicating that this insight has come from God. Because of Simon Peter’s response, Jesus calls him the "rock" upon which Jesus will build the Church. Peter is then given special authority by Jesus, a symbolic key to the Kingdom of Heaven. Peter will play an important role in the early Christian community as a spokesperson and a leader.

The first reading today is a background for the role of Peter in the Church. His role is similar to that of Shebna, the Master of the Palace. Shebna is given the keys of the palace to show that he has complete authority over what happens in the palace. He has fallen short of what was expected of him and was replaced by Eliakim son of Hilkiah. Entrusted with authority, he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the house of Judah. And this is true for Peter as well. He has a role of complete authority in the Church, but always subject to the King, Jesus Christ. We know that Peter denies Jesus after he receives this role in the community of the followers of Jesus. Peter may not be a complete package as one with complete authority in the Church, but as St Paul says in the second reading, "Who could ever know the mind of Lord?.. All the exists comes from him, all is by him and for him. To him be glory for ever! Amen."

We Catholics believe that believing in Jesus Christ is an act of the Church as well as a personal act of faith. Our personal act of faith incorporates us into the group of the followers of Jesus. At the level of our personal spirituality, today we are invited to reflect on our personal faith in Jesus Christ and then on our faith in the Church. Surely it is only our faith in Jesus Christ that allows us to have faith in the Church. Let us pray today for a deeper, more profound **faith in Jesus** and in **His living presence in the world**, the *Church*, one, holy, catholic and apostolic.