

Feast of Saints Peter and Paul

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As we celebrate the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul let's ask for these great Apostles' intercession to have a personal experience of Jesus and a flourish in our faith, as they had had in their lives.

Like St. Peter, let's find out the answer to the question: "Who is Christ for me?" Let us proclaim with St. Peter: "You are Christ, the Son of the Living God."

With St. Paul, we shall affirm our faith: "... for to me, living is Christ." The testimony of Paul in the letter to Galatians (2:19-20) proclaims: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

The question one has to ask oneself today is "Who is Christ to me?" Do we recognize Jesus, the Son of God, as the Saviour in every moment of my life?

Why did Jesus choose the city of Caesarea Philippi to pose this question to the Apostles? It is crucial to know and understand the context, and intention, of Jesus in choosing that location and that time.

From history, we know that it was an ancient city situated at the base of Mount Hermon, a place of pagan gods and temples; including famous gods like Pan, the god of nature; Baal, the god of storm and fertility; Zeus, the god of gods; Nemesis, the goddess of divine retribution; and many other gods. These were all adored, praised, and considered saviours to those who considered them deities. In fact, Herod the Great constructed a big temple for the god Pan in Caesarea Philippi. Another



important aspect to be considered is that the city was named after Caesar Augustus and Herod Philip, Herod's son: hence the name *Caesarea Philippi*.

The first question asked by Jesus, their Master, was an easy one: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" It was an easy question for the disciples, as the answers consisted hearsay and came out as "readymade". The answers included the names of John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. It is always easy to give a readymade answer as it has nothing to do with personal experience.

The second question was the tougher question to face: "But who do you say that I am?" Here, no readymade answer would help the disciples. In the midst of all the influences of pagan religions, powers of many gods, politics, cultures, societal understanding of Jesus, they had to answer. And the nature of the question forces an answer that has to emerge from personal experience; from conviction and a deep-rooted faith in Jesus.

Here, Peter steps up with the answer Jesus expected: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter received this answer and revelation from the innermost core of his heart, revealed to his soul by the Father in heaven. Similarly, Jesus expects our answer to come from a deep faith in our lives. Consequently, a new name was endowed on Simon: 'Peter,' which means, 'rock.' It is said Jesus might have selected to use this location of many gods, many powers and cultures, to create a bold image for how this rock is to serve as a foundation for the Church. The rock has to be solid and strong. And Peter, the rock, became the foundation on which Jesus formed his Church.

Jesus asks the same question to all his followers, in all our daily situations of life: "Who do you say that I am?"

In one of the reflections of *Let's meditate with Saint John Paul II*, a question was asked of a young worker: "Is Jesus Christ one of you?" The young worker replied: "He is one of us; He is completely present in my life. I know He loves me. I see him in every human being. He taught me how to love. It is my Christ who hears me and answers me."

"Who is Christ for me?" Let this be a personal question for each one of us!

In the middle of the modern technological advancements, the many influences of petty gods like wealth, pleasure, position, the worldly powers and their attractions, the daily struggles and challenges of our lives, do we find our answer to be: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." From the lives of Saints Paul and Peter, we know that we should surpass the intellectual knowledge about Jesus, and go beyond into a personal experience and a complete relationship with Christ.

Pope Francis used to say that it is not enough to simply know about Jesus, but rather to have a personal, transformative encounter with him. In his address on September 15, 2024, he cautioned the community with: "I can know many things about Jesus, but if I have not encountered him, I still do not know who Jesus is. It takes this life-changing encounter; it changes one's way of being, one's way of thinking, it changes the relationships you have with your brothers and sisters, your willingness to accept and forgive, it changes the choices you make in life. Everything changes if you have truly come to know Jesus!"

May St. Peter and St. Paul help all of us to meet and encounter Jesus in our daily life, and to have a personal affirmation from within our hearts, enough to proclaim: "Jesus you are the Son of God, my Saviour, and my everything."