

21A 2017 SML
MT 16:13-20

The Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are written with Our Blessed Lord and the Apostles on a journey from Galilee in the north to Jerusalem in the south. The framework for this journey was three separate predictions made by Jesus of his passion, death and resurrection, the first of which is found in this (evening's) morning's gospel. Three times Jesus dragged His Cross into conversation with his Apostles and explained its necessity and three times they began fighting either Him or each other. In this week's gospel, Jesus drags His Cross into conversation. In next week's gospel, they begin fighting, because **men do not like to hear about their sins and the need for expiating them.**

When Our Blessed Lord came to the city of Caesarea Philippi, a city that was half Jewish and half pagan, He spoke of the Church he would found. But before doing so, He had to make clear the form of government which would govern it, and there could be three:

1. the democratic, in which authority and truth is decided by a vote,

2. the aristocratic, in which authority and truth is decided by a select few, and

3. the theocratic, in which authority and truth is supplied and guided by God's revelation.

First appealing to the democratic, Our Blessed Lord asked his Apostles what was the popular opinion concerning Him.

"Who do the people say that I am?" And the inability of men to agree among themselves was revealed in their answer:

Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

These four answers showed Jesus enjoyed a high reputation among men, but none of them recognized Him for who He was, the Son of God.

Since no Church could be founded on confusion of this kind, Jesus turned to the aristocratic: "Who do you, (the select few), say that I am?" The quarreling among them showed the aristocratic form of government would not work as well.

And without solicitation or consent from the others, Peter stepped forward and said:

You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Hence, the theocratic form of government was established, for flesh and blood had not revealed this to him but our heavenly Father:

You shall be called Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church.

With the theocratic form of government came the power to forgive sins:

Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

And this power to forgive sins was again confirmed on Pentecost Sunday:

Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.

Sacramental confession is not as popular a sacrament as it once was, because **men do not like to hear about their sins and the need for expiating them.** But some of the most intimate moments of my priesthood have occurred in Confession, both as a priest hearing confessions, and as a sinner confessing my sins.

When I was a priest at St. Rose in Freehold, I was very involved in our religious education program. There was a student named April, who was in the 8th grade, who came from

a poor home life, and who was, stated simply, a “problem” student, who barely made it to Confirmation, but she did. And after she was confirmed I never saw her again . . . until Good Friday afternoon, four years later when I was a priest at St. Joseph’s in Toms River, and the Church was packed to the gills for the Commemoration of the Lord’s Passion. I did not notice her until after the Commemoration was over and the Church was empty, and sitting by herself, was April. So I walked up to her and said hello and I noticed there were tears running down her cheeks, so I sat in the pew with her. She started off by telling me she had no idea I was a priest in Toms River. Then she proceeded to tell me what had happened to her since I last saw her on her Confirmation Day: that she had dropped out of high school, met a guy three years ago who promised her the world, fell in love with him, got pregnant by him, and as soon as he heard a baby was on the way, left her. And then the tears turned into sobs and I just knew that she was going to say she had an abortion. She told me she asked for God’s forgiveness a hundred times, but she was never really sure she was forgiven. And she had no idea why she even came to Church that Good Friday. But I did. That was an

appointment for us made by God. So I prayed the words of absolution:

God, the Father of Mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself, and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church, may God grant you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I was so glad to tell her the only one who was delighting in her wallow, in her self pity, her shame, her “stinking thinking” was the devil and all of that needed to come to a screeching halt! I told her that the guilt she carried for three years was her penance, and that she was to leave the guilt and the shame with me and to walk out of that Church forgiven.

Because let's face it. We all have stinking thinking. Why?

Because:

- ✓ What we did when we were 20 wasn't cool when we were 40
- ✓ And what we did when we were 40 wasn't cool when we were 60
- ✓ And we we did when we were 60 won't be cool when we're dead

And the only one delighting in your stinking thinking is the devil. So do not give the devil his due.

And every disciplinary conversation I had had with that Freehold student, and her Mother, who could not have cared less, and every time I had to stop class, and every time I thought I was wasting my time, was worth every minute because obviously the same theocratic form of government that inspired Peter to confess Jesus as the Messiah inspired April to come to Church that Good Friday. It was the same theocratic form of government that ordained me to the priesthood and it's the same theocratic form of government that gives me the privilege to offer her absolution from her sins, and get rid of the stinking thinking that we all do.

Men do not like to hear about their sins and the need for expiating them, but all of us the likes of a young girl named April are grateful for that sacrament, and if you're wallowing in the self pity, the shame and the stinking thinking of your past, you'd be grateful to go to confession as well.