

## Pastor's column 21st Sunday 2020

You may be forgiven, for forgetting what lies beyond the Bombay bubble boundary. Often in the early morning, beyond Bombay, one encounters fog from the "flowing waters" of the Waikato river. Sometimes it is so thick, it is difficult to discern the shrouded shapes ahead. Immediately the question comes to mind, "What is it, or what are they?" then as you get closer and perceive, perhaps, they are persons, you may ask, "Who is it, or Who are they?". They seem trivial and unimportant questions because of their commonality, however they are vital and integral for clarity of perception and accuracy of response. What? refers to the nature of a thing. Who? refers to personhood. Jesus assumes the former; that they recognise, at least, his humanity. His perceived ordinariness is well attested elsewhere in the Gospels. Who He is, proves a little more challenging. Jesus often gives Himself the designation, "Son of man." - a not uncommon way of simply saying, "I am". The litany of answers gushes forth; John the Baptist, Elijah, Isaiah, or one of the Prophets. The curious thing is, is that they are all dead, very dead. People recognise that Jesus is no ordinary man. Is he superhuman, the spirit of one of the dead prophets? Jesus then gets up close and uncomfortably personal with his disciples, with the question, "Who do you, say I am.?" Socrates, some 400 years before, demonstrated the power of a question. Questions evoke a response, a gauntlet laid down to think. Questions have consequences, as his last drink, unhappily hemlock, testified. Simon, taking the lead responds, "You are the Christ, Son of the living God." Simon affirms that Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed King of Israel and then goes beyond that to affirm Jesus' Divinity. Jesus bluntly says that such an insight can only be expressed as the result of a gift from his Father. A gift we call the "grace of faith." Jesus' response lays the foundation stone for the whole Catholic edifice. Jesus does four things: 1) changes Simon's (Gk form of Simeon) name. 2) Builds his Church 3) Gives him the Keys 4) Empowers him to "bind and lose."

"Simeon" was one of the 12 Sons of Jacob. Its Greek form is Simon. Jesus changes his name to "Petros" meaning rock. In Judaism to have one's name changed by God was momentous. The new name signified the role to be played. Petros is to be a foundation stone for Jesus' Church. (Church comes from the OE word Kirk which in turn comes from the Greek, "Kyriakon" meaning "belonging to the Lord".)

Another Greek word used to describe Jesus' followers is "ecclesia"- Those who have been called out- They are the new Israel, the new assembly of God. In the Temple of Jerusalem was a rock, the "axis mundi" on which had rested the Ark of the Covenant, the locus of God's presence with his people. The priest would sprinkle that rock, recalling its former significance. Jesus was saying Petros (Peter) was to now be the locus on which the Church, the Sacrament of Christ, would be founded. The Church is the new Temple, centred on Jesus and Peter.

The first reading from Isaiah 22 recalls that the keys of David's Kingdom, some 800 years before Jesus, were held by the person, second only to the King, "al bayith". It was an office, passed down by succession whose symbol of authority was a key. It was the role of this "Prime Minister" to be "father" of the King. (Here is the origin of the title Pope - Papa- father of the Church.)

This Prime Minister, had binding authority and has power to make decisions in the name of the King. When Jesus designates Simon as Peter, He is setting him over the House of God; 1) Second in rank to Jesus, 2) Power over the Church 3) to be father, Pope 4) to have Teaching authority. Whatever Peter teaches authoritatively, "ex cathedra" will be ratified in heaven.

Jesus is establishing a holy office, the incumbent of which assumes its authority. The Papacy is deeply rooted in Scripture, as is the title, "Vicar of Christ."