

August 27 2023

Pr. Steve

Texts: *Letter from A Birmingham Jail*; Romans 12: 1-8; Matthew 16: 13-20

In the name of God, Abba Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Well done, Simon, Son of Jonah, flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but God who is in the heavens! Well done! So I'm going to give you a new name. From now on, I'm going to call you Rocky! [Mt 16: 17-18]*

*Peter gets this great name because he's so wise and profound, he's a spiritual leader, he understood things, he never made mistakes, he was a miracle worker! Nah...*

He gets it because he has received faith. It's not that he was a 'secret Catholic'. He received faith. Faith is not a logical development, an explanation of the universe [that] figures everything out. 'If you just study hard enough you'll get it.' It's a gift that needs to be nurtured--a gift, a new way of seeing things.

And as Jesus looks upon Peter and all the disciples--as he gazes at us--he sees the Church for the first time. That's when the word is [first] used in Matthew's gospel. Jesus sees the Church--the listening ones, the responders, those with that gift of faith.

And so Jesus says, 'Now I'm going to give you the key to how this works. These are the keys to the kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you bind or loosen that will become reality. Whoever you bind in misery will stay in misery. (It's the power we have over each other, isn't it--except it binds our own hearts, but we're not going to go there.) And whatever you loosen, whoever you set free, will be free. (We get to decide.) Whatever you forbid, whatever you permit, it's going to happen. It's up to you. Whoever you include, whoever you exclude--that's what shapes the Church.

And what do we build this Church, this Beloved Community, upon? *Jesus gave us the ultimate rulebook with all the rites and procedures, and all the protocols and bylaws, and we just follow it, and we have no problems, right?* That's what people want, isn't it? 'Tell me the rules, tell me how it works.' No! The Community is built upon the teachings and the life of Christ. And how does that wisdom and grace and insight sink into our hearts? Because this is where the church lives from, this is where the Church comes from--our hearts. How do we live it, how do we love it, how do we manifest that grace, that binding, that loosening? That's what makes it real, it makes us real. We are an organism, not an organization. Can I get an Amen? Do you see how fragile the whole thing is? It has to be lived in love, or it's not happening.

So Paul picks up this exquisite two verses of Romans:

*'I implore you, my brothers and sisters by the mercies of God to offer your very selves as a living sacrifice, not to be immolated [but] like the burning bus, brimming with life and love and faith.'*

[Romans 12

A sacrifice meaning 'to make sacred'.

*"I'm such a good Christian because I'm so miserable! Oh, if you only knew what I've given up.*  
The worship of life through us.

Adapt yourself no longer to the pattern of this present world

We can discern what is good, what is acceptable, what is the truth.

We need that so badly.

Any questions?

I spoke with a friend recently.

She told me, "You know this wonderful little prayer is just starting to rise up within me. It's simply, *'I love you, God!'*" It moves her and gives her a sense of contentment, especially when she goes on walks.

And then she looks at the people around her—ugh, ugh.

There's a former member of Peace, who has now passed on. He told me, "You know I love my children—but I can't stand any of them."