

Text: Matthew 16:13-20

Sermon Outline

Introduction: Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation today is the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew the sixteenth chapter verses thirteen through twenty.

Boys and girls, I pray that you are doing well and are safe and sound today. Have you ever made a promise to someone. Maybe you promised to listen to mom and dad. Maybe you promised that you would clean up your room. Are you always good at keeping your promises? No, we often fail. In our text for today, we hear Peter make a confession, akin to a promises, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. How does Peter's confession help us in our promises today? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

When a young person is inducted into the military, he or she takes an oath, makes a solemn promise. Currently that promise runs like this:

I, _____, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God (Title 10 US Code Chapter 31 § 502).

Most of the young men or women who take that office have some sort of a vague idea that this means military service, perhaps even dangerous military service, as so many have proved. But I wonder if they really know what it means and the responsibility it entails.

Christ empowers us in our confession of him today to assault the very gates of hell. Most of us would be happy if he just let us get a handle on our pet sins or let us put a few dollars in the offering plate for him to put to good use, but Jesus is not satisfied with that. He hears the promises made in Baptism and confirmation and in every confession, and he empowers us through the gift of his Spirit to assault hell itself and win.

ON THIS ROCK OF THE CONFESSION, JESUS THE CHRIST, HE HAS BUILT HIS CHURCH, AND NOT EVEN HELL'S GATES CAN WITHSTAND ITS ONSLAUGHT.

PETER THE ROCK?

ON THIS ROCK, PETER WOULD STORM THE GATES OF HELL.

When our Lord asks the disciples who He is, Peter is right, but at best, confused (vv 13–16). Peter makes a great confession; he gets it right. Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. Peter makes a wonderful confession about who Jesus is. Jesus is not a mere good teacher, not a giver of the Law like Moses and you have to do the work yourself. He is not a wonderful prophet who goes around doing miracles, like Elijah. Rather Jesus is the one who fulfills the Law on our behalf. He does wondrous miracles, greater even than Elijah, to prove and show that He is God in the flesh for us. Our Lord delights in Peter's words of confession and even says he will build his Church on it. But if we keep reading in Matthew, Peter does not do so well with the responsibility that this confession entails.

Jesus knows all of this but still delights in Peter's confession (v 17). Jesus knows all. He knows that in just a few moments, just three verses later Jesus calls Peter "Satan" (16:21–23), for trying to prevent Jesus from going to cross. But that doesn't take away the reality of his good words right now. Peter does get it right in this moment, and God delights in it. and even though Peter will later blow it far worse by denying Jesus three times, Jesus will use him for huge things.

We know the rest of Peter's story. He will deny Christ and weep bitter tears as Jesus is tried. He will run away and leave his friend and Master to die. But that is hardly the end. Jesus tells the women to go first to Peter and then to the rest of the disciples and to meet Jesus in Galilee. There he forgives Peter and restores him back as a disciple (Jn 21:15–17) .

Peter will go on to be a Spirit-filled and bold witness to Jesus before the crowds at Pentecost, before the Sanhedrin, even as he goes to die upon a cross, Peter asks that it be turned upside down as he is not worthy to die the same death that Jesus does. Not upon Peter, but on the Rock of his original confession, that Jesus is the Christ, the Lord would build his kingdom, and hell would have no defense against it.

Christ the Rock

On the same Rock, we will storm hell's gates.

Just as Jesus delighted in Peter's confession, Jesus delights in our confession too. Similar to Peter, we make a promise and a confession of Christ. On the days of our Baptism and confirmation, we got it right. We confessed Jesus with the true and sturdy words of the creed, that He is the only begotten Son of the Father, True God and true man incarnate in the womb of the Virgin Mary. We promise that we will hold fast to this confession and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it. God loves to hear those promises. He delighted in our words that day. He still does as we confess Him before men in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Alas, like Peter, we have not always lived up to those promises we made. We have fled the embarrassment of being a Christian, the danger to our careers, and our popularity. We have followed the ways of men, power, wealth, or our own desires. We do not always get it right all of the time. But like Peter, Christ has sought us out and restored the broken relationship. He has poured out his Holy Spirit on us in the waters of Holy Baptism. When our lives deny our confession, Jesus restores us with His forgiveness, given and won for us by the shedding of His precious blood and His resurrection from the dead.

In doing this, he has empowered us to assault the very gates of hell itself (vv 18b–19). Jesus has said that when we forgive someone, God backs up those words. Through this forgiveness, God uses us to break the bonds of sin and the power of Satan. Sin has trapped our neighbors; they are hell bound in their sins. They are bound by Satan's cruel chains; we are empowered to break those chains. The sweet words of forgiveness that we may speak in Christ are the very blessings of heaven. Hell must yield before them, and the prisoners of sin and death are set free.

Conclusion: Like Peter, we make confessions. Like those soldiers who took an oath of induction, we probably stood before an altar like this one on the day of our confirmation and confessed the name of Jesus. We made solemn promises we little understood, but God did. He loved to hear what we said, and he has promised to use us, even though, like Peter so long ago, we are flawed and sinful people. He has made our words too, "Jesus is the Christ," the rock on which the Church is built. The words we speak in Christ's name and with Christ's love are the hammer blows that crush Satan's power.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.