



1) Opening prayer

Father of everlasting goodness,
our origin and guide,
be close to us
and hear the prayers of all who praise you.
Forgive our sins and restore us to life.
Keep us safe in your love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading

Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of man is?'

And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! Because it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to say to anyone that he was the Christ. From then onwards Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to rebuke him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord,' he said, 'this must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do.'

3) Reflection

- We are now in the narrative part between the Discourse of the Parables (Mt 13) and the discourse of the Community (Mt 18). In these narrative parts which link together the five Discourses, Matthew usually follows the sequence of the Gospel of Mark. Once in a while, he gives other information, also known by Luke. And here and there, he quotes texts which appear only in the Gospel of Matthew, like for example the conversation between Jesus and Peter, in today's Gospel. This text has different interpretations and even opposed ones in the diverse Christian Churches.
- At that time, the communities fostered a very strong affective bond of union with the leaders who had given origin to the community. For example, the communities of Antioch in Syria, fostered their relationship with Peter. Those of Greece, with Paul. Some communities of Asia, with the Beloved disciple and others with the person of John of the Apocalypse. An identification with these leaders to whom they owed their origin helped the communities to foster better their identity and spirituality. But this could also be a reason for dispute, like in the case of the community of Corinth (1 Co 1,11-12).
- Matthew 16, 13-16: The opinions of the people and of the Disciples concerning Jesus. Jesus asks the opinion of the people concerning his person, the Son of Man. The responses are varied: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the Prophets. When Jesus asks the opinion of the Disciples, Peter becomes the spokesman and says: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" The response is not a new one. Before, the Disciples had said the same thing (Mt 14, 33). In John's Gospel, the same profession of faith is made by Martha (Jn 11,27). It means that the prophecies of the Old Testament are realized in Jesus.
- Matthew 16, 17: The response of Jesus to Peter: "Blessed are you, Simon!" Jesus proclaims Peter "Blessed", because he has received a revelation from the Father. Here, also, the response of Jesus is not new. Before, Jesus had praised the Father because he had revealed the Son to the little ones and not to the wise (Mt 11, 25-27) and had made the same proclamation of joy to the Disciples who were seeing and hearing new things which, before them, nobody knew nor had heard (Mt 13, 16).
- Matthew 16, 18-20: The attributions of Peter: To be rock and to receive the keys of the Kingdom.
 - (a) To be rock: Peter has to be Rock that is the stable basis for the Church in such a way that it can resist against the gates of hell. With these words which Jesus addressed to Peter, Matthew encourages the persecuted community of Syria and Palestine who see in Peter the leader who belongs to their origin. In spite of the persecution and the weakness, the community has a firm basis, guaranteed by the word of Jesus. The function of being rock based on faith evokes the word of God to the people in exile: "Listen to me you who pursue saving justice, you who seek Yahweh; consider the rock (pietra) from which you were hewn, the quarry from which you were dug; consider Abraham your father, and Sarah who gave you birth. When I called him, he was the only one, but I blessed him and made him numerous" (Is 51, 1-2). This indicates that a new beginning of the People of God is with Peter.
 - (b) The keys of the Kingdom: Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom. The same power of binding and loosing is also given to the communities (Mt 18, 18) and to the other

disciples (Jn 20, 23). One of the points in which the Gospel of Matthew insists more is reconciliation and pardon. It is one of the more important tasks of coordinators of the communities. By imitating Peter, they should bind and loosen, that is, do in such a way that there is reconciliation and reciprocal acceptance, construction of fraternity, even up to seventy times (Mt 18, 22).

- Matthew 16, 21-22: Jesus completes what was missing in Peter's response, and Peter reacts. Jesus begins saying: "that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer very much on the part of the Elders, of the high priests and of the Scribes, and would be killed and on the third day, he would rise from the dead". Saying that he had to go and would be killed, or that it was necessary to suffer, he indicated that suffering had been foreseen by the prophecies. The way of the Messiah is not only one of triumph and glory, but also one of suffering and of the cross! If Peter accepts Jesus as the Messiah and son of God, he has to accept him also as Messiah servant who will be killed. But Peter does not accept the correction of Jesus and tries to draw him away. Taking Jesus aside, he began to rebuke him: Heaven preserve you, Lord, this must not happen to you!"

- Matthew 16, 23: the response of Jesus to Peter: stumbling stone. The response of Jesus is surprising. Peter wanted to direct Jesus taking the initiative. Jesus reacts: "Get behind me, Satan. You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do". Peter has to follow Jesus, and not the contrary. Jesus is the one who gives the directions. Satan is the one who draws persons away from the road traced by Jesus. Once again the expression rock – pietra - appears, but now in the contrary sense. Peter, at one time is the supporting rock, at other times the stumbling rock! The communities at the time of Matthew were like that, characterized by ambiguity. This is the way we all are, according to what John Paul II said, that the Papacy itself, was characterized by the same ambiguity of Peter: rock of support for the faith and stumbling rock in the faith.

4) Personal questions

- Which are the opinions about Jesus which exist in our community? These differences in the way of living and of expressing faith, do they enrich the community or do they render the way more difficult?
- What type of rock is our community? Which is the mission for us?

5) Concluding Prayer

Give me back the joy of your salvation,
sustain in me a generous spirit.

I shall teach the wicked your paths,
and sinners will return to you. (Ps 51, 12-13)