

The Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, Apostles
St. Matthew 16:13-20
June 29th, 2021
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

On This Rock I Will Build My Church

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

True worship is made up of two things: first is that the Lord God comes to us; the second is that we respond to the Lord God. Those two things make up worship, and they have to come in that order. The Lord God must come to us before we can respond to Him. He must come to be with us, before we can declare Him to be our Lord and Savior.

In order for the Apostles to worship the Lord + Jesus, He had to come to be with them. In order for us to worship the Lord + Jesus, He must come to us first, too. In order for the world to worship the Lord + Jesus as the Christ, He must come to the world. Later this week, on July 2nd, we will celebrate the Festival of the Christ called “The Festival of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.” The events of the Gospel reading for that day from the Evangelist St. Luke take place just a few days after the angel Gabriel came to the Blessed Virgin Mary and declared to her that she would give birth to the Savior of the world. That announcement was made for us in the Church, on March 25th, when we celebrated the Festival of the Annunciation of the Lord. The events of the Festival of the Visitation, though, is our first introduction to the Lord + Jesus in the flesh.

This is the first time we meet our Lord + Jesus in the flesh. It is the first time we meet our Lord Who has come down from Heaven to dwell with us, His creation. The baby in the womb of Elizabeth—St. John the Baptist—leaps for joy that the Savior has come to dwell with His people, even though St. John the Baptist is still in the womb and only six months old. The Blessed Virgin Mary with her first singing of the Magnificat, Elizabeth with her proclamation that the Virgin would be blessed among women for generations, and the infant in the womb of Elizabeth—St. John the Baptist—all worship the Lord + Jesus Who has come down from Heaven to be with them and be their Savior. They are the first to worship the Lord + Jesus in our flesh and blood.

Today in our Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew, we meet our Lord + Jesus as a full-grown man in His early thirties. He is in the midst of His ministry here on Earth. In His ministry here on Earth He comes repeatedly to the lost children of Israel. He heals there sick; He cures their leprosy; He restores the sight to the blind; He makes the deaf to hear again; He casts out demons, destroying the kingdom of Satan by waging war against the devils and driving them out; He also raised the dead to life again, even as He Himself will rise again from the dead on the third day. He had come to His people, the people whom He had created on the sixth day of creation. He came to the

descendants of Adam and Eve who were filled with sin on account of their first parents' disobedience to the command of the Lord God. He came to be with them to buy them back from sin, death and the devil, and rescue them from their enemies of the devil, the world and their sinful flesh.

Because He had come to them, the people worshiped Him. But worship must be pure. The one thing that destroys pure worship is false teaching. There is no greater impurity in worship than heresy, that is, in teaching falsehood in worship. Impure doctrine in sermons, in phrases in the Liturgy, in the hymns that we sing, and even improper ceremonial all ruin the content and form of true worship. For it either takes the focus off the One Who we are supposed to be worshipping—our Lord + Jesus—and places it upon mankind, much as the Roman Church of the Middle Ages leading up to the Reformation of the Church had done. They made their worship and act of man which was meant to appease the Lord God. Many Reformed churches today also take the focus off of the true object of our worship by focusing on the things of mankind—their feelings, their social justice, their gathering together with their fellow man. Our focus in worship always must be the Person Who has come to us to give us His gifts, not the imaginations of mankind.

We see from the Gospel pericope from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew that the people's worship of the Lord Who had come to them also were imperfect in their worship. When our Lord + Jesus asks His Apostles, Who do the people say that He is the various responses are: St. John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. There were many false notions about Who this Man + Jesus was. The worship of the people was impure because they did not recognize Who the Lord + Jesus was. The Apostles, though, knew. When our Lord + Jesus asked the Apostles Who they thought He was, St. Peter, who along with St. Paul, whose anniversary of their deaths we celebrate today, proclaimed on behalf of all the Apostles, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Here was true worship. Here was pure worship. The Lord + Jesus had come to His people. He had done all of His signs and wonders among the people. He had come to fulfill the Law and will of God perfectly on behalf of all of us poor, miserable sinners who are descended from Adam and Eve. The Apostles had been witnesses to all of these things. So, St. Peter, on behalf of the Apostles, worships the Lord + Jesus, the One Who had come to them, rightly by proclaiming that He is the One, True Lord and Savior of the mankind. He is the One Who has come to redeem His people from sin, death and the power of the devil. He is the One Who will rescue us from our enemies of the devil, the world and our sinful flesh. He is the only One worthy of our praise and thanksgiving. He is the only One worthy of our worship. He is the Christ, the Anointed Son of the Living God, come down from Heaven to redeem us poor, miserable sinners from our sin and the consequences of sin we face every day.

Upon this rock—the Rock of the Christ of the Living God—our Lord + Jesus built the Church. Against Him nothing can prevail, not even the gates of Hades. He is the firm foundation upon which the Church is built. He is the firm foundation upon which all of our worship is built. If our focus in worship is not upon the One Who comes to us with His good gifts, our worship is false and impure. He is the One Who comes to us in His Word and Sacraments to give us forgiveness, life and salvation. Indeed, our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ has given to the Church the means by which we can receive forgiveness of all of our sins. He has given to us the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven open and keep shut the doors of Heaven. All those who are impenitent sinners, who refuse to repent of their sins and amend their sinful ways, the Church locks the doors of Heaven—bars those miserable sinners from Heaven—in order that they might be made aware of just how terrible and destructive their sin is to them. We bind the sins of the impenitent, in order that they may be led into penitence when they feel the gravity of their sins. This is purely an act of love, for love desires that all sinners repent and turn in faith to the Lord + Jesus and His works and merits, forsaking all of their props that they have set up to bolster them in their sinfulness. Therefore, the Church locks the doors of Heaven to keep out those who remain in impenitence for their benefit

and good.

Our Lord + Jesus comes to us in worship—us poor, miserable sinners—in order to give us His good gifts. He comes to open the doors of Heaven for us. For the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven also open the gates of Heaven to let in all of those who repent of their sins and wish to live better lives. But as grand as forgiveness is, our focus in worship is not on what has been done for us, but on Who does it for us. We worship the One Who has come to us to grant us forgiveness. We give Him honor, praise and thanksgiving for rescuing us from the perils of sin and death.

He rescued us, and all of mankind, from the perils of sin and death, by offering up His life as a ransom for ours. All those who cling in faith to the Lord + Jesus—to the foundation of all of our worship—are justified in Heaven before the throne of the heavenly Father. We worship the One Who comes to us to give us His gifts, by thanking and praising Him for those gifts; for forgiveness, life and salvation.

Therefore, my dear friends, as we celebrate our Feast of Pentecost and the anniversary of our parish, let us worship in truth and purity, and make the object of our worship the only One Who is worthy to be worshiped—our Lord + Jesus Christ. Let us also continue on this path of true worship whenever we come together as a people of the Lord God to worship the Lord + Jesus, and receive His gifts which He comes to bring to us. Let us remain faithful to the pure preaching of the Word of God, and continue to rightly administer the Sacraments according to our Lord's institution. And if ever the day comes when we fail in this, let us in all humility repent and turn back to worshiping in truth and purity the only One worthy of our honor, praise and thanksgiving—our Lord + Jesus Christ. For upon this Rock the Church—and our parish—has built her foundation, so that we may continue to build and grow by our Lord's grace. May the Lord continue to grant us His grace. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!