**21st SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [24th August, 2014]**

READINGS: Isaiah 22:19-23/ Romans 11:33-36 / Matthew 16:13-20

THEME: **“I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH” (Mt. 16:18)**

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

In asking the questions (Who do the people say I am? Who do you say I am?), Jesus was leading His disciples to know and confess His true IDENTITY. And it was St. Peter who got the answer right: “You are the CHRIST, the SON of the LIVING GOD” (Mt. 16:16). It is this FAITH in Jesus (as both the CHRIST and DIVINE) which is the rock on which He has built His Church. In other words, the foundation of the Church is faith in Jesus as the expected Messiah who is, at the same time, the Son of God. Therefore, beloved, if anyone should preach that there is another saviour of the world, he/she is not worthy of being listened to. And should someone else preach that Jesus Christ is not the only begotten Son of God, he/she is an anti-Christ, and he/she must be ignored.

Secondly, in saying, “I will build MY Church” (Mt. 16:18), Jesus Christ makes it clear that He is the Founder of the Church, and it belongs to Him. And because this “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church” (Nicene Creed) belongs to Christ, who is divine and almighty, “the gates of hell shall not prevail over it” (Mt. 16:18). Therefore, until Christ comes again, all the direct and indirect attacks of the evil one can only scratch the surface (external aspects) of the Church. That is why the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church” has stood firm on its rock-foundation for almost 2,000 years, despite the persecutions, blasphemies and other attacks. Indeed, “if God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). Beloved, with Christ, the Son of God, on our side we are counted among the ultimate winners!

Thirdly, until Jesus Christ, the divine Head of the Church, comes in glory, the Church’s founding faith has to be passed on from one generation to another. To ensure this, Christ appoints human leaders, beginning with St. Peter, as instruments of the Holy Spirit. Jesus appointed St. Peter, because our heavenly Father manifested His choice by revealing His Son’s identity through Peter (*cf*. Mt. 16:17). The appointment goes with an awesome authority: “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mt. 16:19). This great authority is, however, for service. St. Peter and his successors (the popes), as instruments of the Holy Spirit and servants of Christ, are to be at the service of the divine Persons for the salvation of souls. Beloved, since the all-holy Lord is our ultimate Head, let us serve Him in holiness.

Fourthly, the Church is not a social club of good people. In other words, Christ did not establish the Church with the sole aim of promoting good human existence on this earth. Rather, the Church has, first and foremost, a spiritual goal: the eternal life of souls. The Church is a sign and instrument by which God brings humans into communion with Him in heaven. Thus, **the Church could be described simply as the gate of heaven**. Therefore, St. Peter, whom the Lord made the leader of the Church, was entrusted with the keys of the Church as the gate of heaven. That is, through the ministry of St. Peter and the other apostles and disciples, many would receive from God the grace to enter heaven. So finally, beloved, though unlike St. Peter, we have not been given the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, we have roles to play for more souls to enter the Kingdom of heaven. By witnessing to our faith through words and deeds, and by teaching or encouraging others to seek Christ may the Holy Spirit lead many more souls into Paradise. Amen!