

At various points in our lives we need to “step up to the plate.”

As scary as some of these times have been, they usually have been moments that have initiated some transitions in our lives and offered us the opportunity to draw upon the memories of our early years. We discover we are part of an emerging story of the persistence of God in furthering his intentions and mission and that we have this incredible opportunity *to touch, carry, and share that which is very sacred.*

The Moses story begins with the murder of children and then pivots on the women of the story – the mother and sister of Moses, the daughter of Pharaoh, and the midwives who earlier refused to participate in Pharaoh’s terrible scheme – all become for us beacons. They are carriers of the sacred, and people who stepped up to the plate to make possible an emergence of a scared story that was to define the life of the Hebrew people and in our own religious heritage.

In Matthew, we hear again Peter’s confession, which became for him and for the disciples an invitation to carry an awesome responsibility of furthering God’s mission of reconciliation. Peter’s confession is preceded by two questions: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”, and then “But who do **you** say that I am?” The disciples are asked to step up to the plate. And so are we

The one appointed to “feed the lambs and sheep” of Christ, to “confirm his brethren,” and welcome the first pagan convert into the Church, was not *a born saint*. Weakness of faith (when he began to sink), rash self-confidence and eventual denial are also portrayed by him. But these serve only to underline the grandeur of his conversion, when with a new clarity of self-knowledge he turns and says to Jesus: “You know that I love you” three times on that picnics on the beach. He served and built and united the early church community in mutual love and faithful obedience.

Jesus remains at the centre, as the Christ, Son of the Living God, and he continues to be the Church’s true Rock. The church today, just as much as in the time of St Peter, needs the ministry of faithful apostles, entrusted by Christ to build up his people, witness to the faith, and provide leadership in

But who you say that I am?"

Christian love. Peter may have been (Rocky2!) the first to recognise The Christ, but the building of the church would not have been possible without the other apostles stepping up to the plate as well.

"For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain."

1 Corinthians 15 (3-10)

The church is still under construction in so many ways. The church is always growing, changing, searching for new, more nimble, more creative, more flexible ways of being God's people. Each time a new member is added to our rolls, each time a person is baptized, we must be prepared to be called to new and different ways to "do all in our power to support one another in our life in Christ."

Today's lessons end by asking the rest of us, the adults, to step up to the plate grab hold of the differing gifts given to us through God's grace, and take responsibility for living out the answer to the question: "But who do you say that I am?"

This is not easy to answer, for behind our responses we have our own histories, our own working through all of those messages from our own childhood, our own disappointments and failures, our own physical and emotional pains, our own experiences of loneliness or feeling of little worth. We come to this place from the contexts of our living. We are buffeted by many things, some which we cannot see. Life is complex and full. Sometimes we bask in the glow of contentment. Sometimes we don't know where we are going or who is around us. Life is full in all of its complexities, and we bring all those complexities here at **this** moment in

this place., to respond to that question again: "But who do you say that I am?"

This church that the Lord began with Peter, and that we are a part of, is a holy and a sacred thing. It is not merely or mainly a voluntary association of like-minded people; it is not primarily or at its heart a human institution. It is instead a divine mystery, a holy thing, much greater than we can see or imagine—stronger even than death itself, vast in space and time. It is built of stones, or rocks; and these stones are laid one atop the other. They touch, so the building is a single structure that continues through space and time. That continuity is a continuity of Christ's presence, a continuity of faith, a continuity of tradition and doctrine, and a continuity of persons—each connected to those who went before.

That continuity is important. We call it "Apostolicity." In the Nicene Creed we say that the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. This continuity of doctrine, faith, and persons is the apostolic part. The Apostolic Succession is enacted in every Ordination of Priests and Consecration of Bishops of our bishops, representing the link with Peter and the others — it is one important way we are connected to the Apostles and the early church. But Apostolicity also means that the rocks are laid one on top of the other. Each new name, each new rock, builds on something unbroken and continuous. Jesus says to each of us, you are Peter, you are Rocky, Rocky 5 billion—or whatever.

But this runs much deeper, because every baptism confirmation or attestation or whatever rite of passage we use in our denominations, is part of this apostolicity! We're in it together!

Apostolicity connects us to the future

What Jesus stresses in his naming of Peter is the historical and spiritual reality that the church he is creating is his—his alone. No one can create another church. Christ's church can be built on no other foundation, with no other living stones than those he names, and with no other cornerstone and chief builder than Christ himself. We constantly re-live this Gospel story. As we say to Jesus, "you are the Christ," he says to us—to each of us—

But who you say that I am?"

"you, too, are Peter, you too, are a rock, and with you, also, I am building my church." What happened to Peter continues and it includes us.

Jesus called Peter blessed, fortunate, happy. Remember what that blessedness looked like. Remember Peter's life of poverty and struggle, of denial and conversion, of pain and of conflict and, finally, of a martyr's death. That's what Jesus meant by blessed. To be given a new name by Jesus, to have a Christian name, this always includes being named as servant, as minister, as one who gives one's self, and so become a gift to the world in the name of Christ. To be chosen, to be called, to be named as part of the glorious company of Christ's church, to be another Rocky, this is never done as a sign of privilege, but always as a mark for service; never for ourselves alone, but always for others.

Then there is the promise of endurance against all assaults of evil. A promise that has been remarkably kept through 20 centuries down to our own day. It is a testimony to the firmness of a foundation whose strength basically comes from Truth and Love. As long as faith, hope, and love are strong in the community, it will survive and flourish.

We may have many conflicting theologies and spiritualities, but we have that question forever before us "But who do you say that I am?", and every time we answer with Peter "you are The Christ!", we have our focal point not of uniformity but of Christian unity. *"There is one body and one Spirit... there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, there is one God and Father of all, who is Lord of all, works through all and is in all..."*

(Ephesians 4:4-6)