

21st Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A (August 21, 2011)

Social Media is a frequently used phrase to describe a new and powerful means of communication – where technology, cell phones, texting and Facebook allow us to communicate with countless numbers of people with the press of a button. But because some are using this method of communication for destructive purposes, there is a call to place limits and controls on the use of mass texting when large numbers of people are concerned, e.g. Taste of Chicago or Lollapalooza.

Because a handful of people are misusing social media, we are beginning to paint with broad strokes the negative consequences, causing many to refuse to engage in any or most forms of social media. If you know anything about me, you would know that I am the last person to defend social media since I don't even understand most of it. But I realize its importance and the fact that it is here to stay, so let's use the many means of communicating to a large audience in ways that enhance and build up community.

Jesus wants his message to spread and he knows that we are the ones to take on the mission. But he also knows we need structures and organization to do so. He asks the most important question in the gospels: "Who do **you** say that I am?" Only Peter responds with a response that is the foundation of the entire Church and her mission, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

This confession of faith was given to Peter by the Father, a gift that would live and breathe in the Apostles, their successors (bishops) and the Church. And Jesus chose Peter as the one on whom he would build his church..."Peter, the Rock." In doing so, in creating this ministry of authority and leadership grounded in his washing of the feet of humanity, Jesus gave the church a gift of communication in the widest possible way, a means to spreading the gospel.

Each one of us is a living "text," a living "e-mail," in that we can communicate in so many ways our love of Christ and our belief that he was sent by the Father to redeem us, sending us into the world as instruments of a "new heaven and a new earth." We are the voice of Christ. But frequently, this voice has been one that has turned people away from Christ and his gospel; many of the successors of St. Peter have not grounded their authority in the washing of the feet but in a need to control and create unnecessary burdens through legislation. Some led lives of moral bankruptcy.

Be that as it may, the Popes who have misused their means of communicating the foundational truth of our Church, that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the Living God," this does not mean that we should or can eliminate the ministry of Peter and his successors. Nor should we focus on those who have exercised this ministry in questionable, if not destructive, ways. History has given us many wonderful and holy Popes, men who have spoken the heart of our faith to inspire theologians, mystics, artists, sculptors, poets and even political revolutionaries, e.g. the Solidarity movement in Poland. One Pope ignited the Catholic social justice movement, another called a worldwide Ecumenical Council, Vatican II, to transform the Church, and many have shed their blood for the faith.

What Jesus said to Peter, giving him a unique authority, has been given to each one of us: we have the power to "bind and loose" when we forgive sins or refuse to do so; we have the power to open the gates of heaven to others by our witness and actions. The Father uses each one of us as a means to building bridges, each one of us being a bridge to Christ, showing people the "way." We are human bridges between people of other religions and cultures through dialogue and communication.

The greatest "social media" is us ...humanity...each and every human being can communicate the message of the gospel, not with the push of the button, but with the beat of a heart, a heart that just wants to love and show Christ, the Son of the Living God to a world that so desperately needs us to communicate this message. The foundation of the Church is Christ, not the Pope, who is only his servant and the servant of his People.