



# Power (part ii). By Fr. Frank Latzko

*“He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.’” Matthew 16:19*

A few weeks ago, several parishioners went to the mission, La Posada, in San Benito, Texas, to establish a relationship between our parish and the people of this mission. The experience gave us, those who made this pilgrimage of faith, a concrete beautiful gift: an example of how power rooted in humility can transform our lives and our world.

The power of the “keys” of St. Peter, the power given to him and every baptized person, is power rooted in Christ’s unconditional love for every human being who has lived, is living, and will live. Past, present, and future all converge on the Cross of selfless love. Power, rooted in deep humility, never refers to itself or the person

holding the power. Its focus, its energy is rooted outside the ego and inside the heart of the Christ who descended into the heart of human suffering to breathe new life and mercy. But the cross must precede the new life of resurrection.

Peter would have none of this cross! He was thinking in terms of the Christ conquering the enemy and eliminating suffering. Peter had no idea what he was saying, for he wanted to prevent Christ from embracing the Paschal mystery of the cross and resurrection. Peter immediately abuses the power given him by focusing the power on himself, his ego, his way of understanding salvation. Power, for Peter, became self-

referential and selfish, a recipe for disaster. Jesus responds to this horrible reaction of Peter by saying something harsh and extreme, calling Peter, "Satan." Quite a reaction but appropriate, given how destructive power can be when it turns in on itself.

Last week, I listened to a speech our president gave at a rally in Phoenix, Arizona. I listened as long as I could, wanting him to say one sentence that might heal and unite. One sentence, expressing deep sorrow at the death of a woman to a crazed white supremacist. One sentence, acknowledging the pervasive racism in our county, usually under the surface, hidden, but exploding in a march by people consumed with hatred on many fronts. One sentence like this would have had power. Yes, he did say this in previous speeches but the message got lost in his own equivocation.

The president is the leader of all Americans, not just his base of supporters. The president's references to his houses and how big they are, the size of his adoring crowds, and all the hard work he has done, only reinforces his understanding of power as something he possesses and is manifested by wealth, possessions and celebrity. What I heard was power expressed in a way totally focused on the person holding the authority.

The president knows what's best for us, just like Peter thought he knew what was best for Jesus.

At the mission in Texas, we witnessed the example of two Catholic bishops who exhibited power in ways diametrically opposed to what I witnessed from our president during his speech at the rally.



These two bishops listened to the stories of the people from a number of different countries fleeing oppression and violence. They blessed them, thanked them for their lives, thanked the volunteers and specifically mentioned the people of St. Teresa's. They spoke about everyone but themselves, never mentioning how much they are doing to help refugees and immigrants.

They focused on the Sisters' lives of service and the many volunteers; they saw in the suffering refugees the face of Christ. Two men of great power never referred to themselves, their position of authority or the successes of their ministry.

Humility is the foundation of the power Jesus gave to Peter in the "keys" and to us through our baptism. Humility coupled with power creates beauty and goodness. This expression of power inspires, unites, and encourages others to tap into the same power within themselves. I walked away from my encounter with those two holy bishops feeling

empowered to reach out to others. What I remember from these two leaders of the Church: men who loved the people they serve and who were transformed by these very same people.

Jesus is telling Peter, the disciples, and us that true power comes from accepting the many crosses in life, standing with those who are excluded, being at the end of the line, loving all as neighbor, especially the enemy. There is a power in shining the light on others and their accomplishments, sharing our wealth and resources and being a gentle voice of reason in the midst of conflict and pain.

Every human being has a hidden power in the heart of their being, waiting to be expressed, as a leader in politics or religion, as a parent, a coach, a teacher. We all have power, but it is how we express that power that makes all the difference. The immigrants and refugees at La Posada, and those two bishops exuded a power our president might well emulate.

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