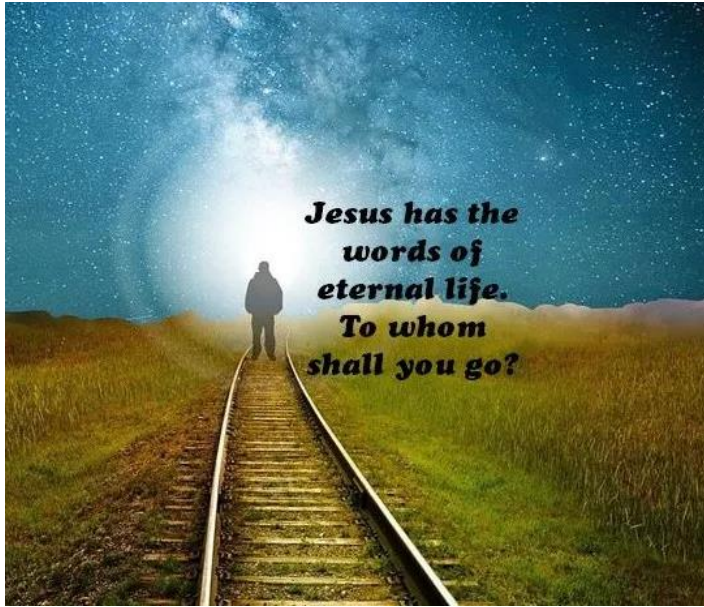


Homily – August 25, 2024 – 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Peter, the Apostle, is one of my favorite characters in the Gospels, and it's not because he's considered the leader of the pack or the first pope of the Church. He's one of my favorites because he's so human; he's so relatable. When he's on his game, there's nobody like him. For instance, when Jesus asked the 12, "**Who**



do you say that I am?" It was Peter who gave the brilliant answer, "**Jesus, you are the Christ, Son of the living God**" (Mt. 16:16). And today he gives the inspiring answer, "**You have the words of eternal life.**"

When Peter is on, he's really on. And when he's off, he's really off. But what I like most about him is that he's a man of faith. He doesn't have all the answers, and

he's honest enough to know it. He lives in the middle ground where answers don't come easily, and when they do come, they are rarely the answers he wanted. His journey is always a walk of faith—just like yours and mine--three steps forward and two steps back. Peter is in the "middle ground" position. The middle ground position, which is the dominant position in all of us, goes something like this: "You, Jesus, have the words of eternal life. I have no clue what you are talking about or what you are asking of me at this point of my life, but you have the words of eternal life! I stuck with you, Jesus, through the cannibalism gig ("eat my flesh"), and I stuck with you through the vampire gig ("drink my blood"), so I'm going to stick with you now even though I don't know where it will lead me. Besides, if I don't stick with you, **to whom shall we go?** You have the words of eternal life. I don't get it, but I'm not walking like all those other people; I'm sticking around until some day it all makes sense."

Peter has tasted and seen the truth, the real. When you have tasted the real in your life, you don't want to waste your time anymore with what is not real, with what is fake. When a light switch goes on in your mind, and you start to appreciate real art, you stop decorating your house with WalMart art. When you savor good food, you have no more desire for fast food. When you are exposed to good liturgy, you can no longer tolerate shoddy liturgy. Once you know Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, you know immediately when your soul is aligned with the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and, conversely, when you have settled for second best.

Every day we are given glimpses, and sometimes whumps over the head, with what is real. Have you ever just sighed a really deep sigh? Have you ever felt lethargic, cynical, under-appreciated, not loved, just down? Of course you have. What was happening, just a nano second before that "down" feeling washed over you, is that you had an experience of the real, the divine, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and then it collapsed and you were back staring at the dirty dishes in the sink. You got a glimpse, in a nano second, of what life should be, could be, and was always intended to be, and the next second you were back in the world of what is. But at least you had that glimpse, and you have something to hope in. Jesus, you have the words of eternal life. I get it, for a brief moment, and then I get discourage in the very next moment. Don't hold onto the discouragement; hold on to the glimpse. Ask God to turn that glimpse into a steady way of seeing.

Here's something I find interesting. One in 20 Americans (5%), claim to have had a near-death experience. Some, but not all, described how they hovered over their bodies like as if, for a brief moment, they were in a parallel universe, a bigger universe, a more all-encompassing world. When they did not die, but returned to their bodies, they all came to the same conclusions. Whether they were American or not, a person of strong faith or an atheist, young, old, rich or poor, it didn't seem to matter. People who have experience an altered state of consciousness (not through hallucinogenic drugs), and claim it to be a near-death experience, every one of them describes it the same way. It doesn't matter where in the world you go; it's always the same conclusions. They have:

1. An amazing ability to live in the present. Most of us live in the two places where nothing ever happens: the past and the future. But the present is all we have. Every moment is a microcosm of the macrocosm. How you're doing whatever you're doing right now is probably how you do everything.

2. An abiding sense of deep confidence. The untransformed self is inherently insecure and destabilized. The true Self finds a strong and lasting confidence - a sense that things are all right - without this being based on your external circumstances at all. You don't know where the feeling comes from. It's just there.

3. An immense decreased interest in material possessions. The True Self knows that happiness doesn't lie in another trip to the mall, or a bigger house, or any external attainment.

4. Spirituality becomes central and important. People know for certain the reality of the spiritual world.

5. A much higher natural compassion - which extends to almost everything. There's a deep gratitude for everything. A forgiveness for everything.

6. A strong sense of life's purpose - and that life has a purpose. The purpose itself can't necessarily be verbalized, but there's a sense that life is going somewhere, it all means something, it all matters. How you interact even with the check-out girl at the supermarket has significance. And that it's worth the courage of taking ownership and responsibility for who you really are.

7. The sense that all life and love has inherent value. In group/out group thinking stops. You see the connectedness of things, and the world becomes a sacred universe. As Fr. Richard Rohr says, "once you've embraced the demon inside, the demon outside can no longer hurt you."

8. An amazing ability to enjoy a high degree of solitude and silence. People who've faced death don't need to have the radio on all the time. They generally don't like loud or jarring music when they do have it on. They tend to prefer music that doesn't make you angry, but that gathers the various parts of you together. You no longer enjoy heavy metal or hard rock music because it dissipates the soul. You throw your Megadeath records out and prefer classical music for the rest of your life.

9. A desire to live a more social, communitarian, participatory form of life. As much as this might seem to contradict the previous item, it doesn't. Transformed people can sit in silence, and still feel connected. And they know that life is about servanthood. Leaving the small self behind, and living in the larger

self, you feel a sense of abundance. The True Self knows there's nothing to lose, and that the more I give away, there's always a deeper discovery of the Self.

10. A strong sense of wonder, a perennial sense of gratitude. You're grateful, and don't even know why. You just have that quiet confidence, for no reason. The true Self, Fr. Rohr says, is always confident, and always grateful.

Jesus has a word for this glimpse into reality. When the soul opens to something larger, more wonderful than itself, he calls it the Kingdom of God. When we see it—even if only for a nano second before it collapses—let's pray that that glimpse may become a second glimpse and a third and a fourth until it becomes the regular and steady way, we see all the time. Then we'll say as Peter did, ***“You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”***

~Fr. Phil