

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (A)
21ST AUGUST 2011

Once again the Gospel focuses on Peter.

There was something about Peter that people remembered. There was something about Peter that caused our Lord to give him the responsibility of being the rock on which the Church is built.

So what was so special about Peter?

Last time we met Peter in the Gospel he was trying to walk on water and he sank. Now Jesus is calling him a rock. Rock had never been used as a proper name before. It was a new name for a new relationship.

So what has changed?

Peter sank because his faith was weak. Now Jesus is congratulating him on the strength of his faith.

It is the quality of Peter's faith that is important.

On the Sea of Galilee his faith was insufficient; now it is sufficient but not perfect. Just after this profession of faith he tries to dissuade Jesus from crucifixion and receives a stinging reply. Jesus calls Peter "Satan" for trying to tempt him away from his God-given purpose.

When Jesus is arrested, Peter denies that he knows him three times.

Sufficient faith is not perfect faith. So what made Peter's faith sufficient?

One possibility is his positive attitude and enthusiasm.

He had no hesitation in jumping out of boats to be first to meet Jesus. He was always the first to speak when Jesus invited a response. Sufficient faith is quick to respond to the word of the Lord.

Secondly he always recognised his mistakes and faults and repented of them.

Sufficient faith is humble enough to admit faults and desire to be better; does not pretend to be perfect

A third feature of Peter's faith was his response to Jesus' question:

"Who do you say I am?"

Jesus was not asking about his reputation. He knew that.

He wanted Peter to state his own belief that Jesus is the Christ, "the Son of the Living God."

Jesus asks each one of us: "Who do you say I am?"

Our response to this question determines the values that form our personality and the way we live our lives. Faith in Jesus gives us the values that will bring us lasting joy in this changing world, as we prayed in our opening prayer.

We may not feel as confident in our answer as Peter was, but our Gospel tells us that Peter's faith was revealed by God the Father.

Sufficient faith is discovered not in agreeing with other people or in trying to convince ourselves, but comes from God in personal prayer.

This requires perseverance.

There is always much to confuse, depress and distract us.

Peter's faith was like a rock because he never gave up in spite of all the disappointments.

Nelson Mandela believed that perseverance is more important than talent. Students demonstrate this every year. There was one on the front page of yesterday's *Echo* who struggled and struggled with her religious studies A level but would not give up. She ended with a B grade.

Sufficient faith will not be put off by difficulties.

Rock resists everything that tries to destroy it.

So does sufficient faith even when life seems meaningless.

Faith seeks understanding but does not depend on it.

When we lack confidence let's pray with St. Paul in the second reading: "How rich are the depths of God – how deep his wisdom and knowledge and how impossible to penetrate his motives or understand his methods! To him be glory for ever!"

Rev Geoff Carey