

An Inauguration

St. Peter the Apostle (transferred), January 20, 2021

Church of the Ascension, Chicago

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Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus. - Acts 4:8-13

When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." - Matthew 16:13-19

In his inaugural speech earlier today, President Biden recalled that on “another January in Washington, on New Year’s Day 1863, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. When he put pen to paper, Lincoln said, ‘If my name ever goes down into history it will be for this act and my whole soul is in it.’”

And then the President went on to say, “My whole soul is in it. Today, on this January day, my whole soul is in this: Bringing America together; uniting our people; and uniting our nation.”

Both the larger context of the inauguration and this moment of it give us a lively, present access point to consider the Confession of St. Peter that we commemorate in this mass. I trust you would agree with me that the way that we Christians imagine this Confession of Peter, his whole soul is in it. There’s a surge of energy at this point in the narrative. The divine nature of Jesus that this passage brings to the fore is partly emphasized by Peter’s evident ‘whole soul’ intensity.

Some of us may have known similar *all in* moments in our lives. The one thing to which our souls are rightly drawn puts in perspective all of the baggage and impediments with which one’s life has been cluttered. With surprising ease, one lets go of all that one dragged along for so long. The compass needle that had so wildly swung all over the map for so long now comes around and remains fixed in one primary direction, toward Christ.

For Peter, that moment comes when Jesus asks “... *who do you say that I am?*” [And] *Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’*” His whole soul is in it.

We can also rightly call this an inaugural moment because of what immediately follows. Jesus explains to Simon Peter that his Confession was only possible by way of divine revelation, and then Jesus says, “*I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*”

We don’t have time to unpack all of that – what Jesus intended by some or all features of that response to Peter. But we don’t need precise interpretations to recognize the inaugural nature of this moment. And take note: Peter’s bold sermon in our first reading this evening would have been delivered only a few months after the moment recorded in today’s gospel. Peter has his key out! He is boldly using it in hopes of unlocking the hearts of others, that they, too, might put their whole soul in it.

Referencing the inauguration this evening isn’t just a convenience of proximity. We all know that some so-called confessions of faith are just a lot of hot air, sometimes of the kind that merely escapes loudly and annoyingly and without any benefit to anyone. More often than not, a true and faithful Capital ‘c’ Confession of the kind that Peter experienced, and of the kind we ourselves may have experienced or can experience, ushers in, begins, inaugurates, something new: a mission, a leaving behind, a new commitment. It was, is or will be a realignment in which Christ comes into clearer view, for us and for others, as “*the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*”

We often know that our own whole soul is in Christ not only by way of a confession of faith but when we also see in it some inaugural invitation or moment. We cross a line between hobby religion and walking the way of the cross. Maybe we, like Peter, even share our faith in Christ aloud for the benefit of others. Maybe we become the key to the kingdom for another who has desperately been searching for it. *Amen.*