

Twenty First Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 27, 2017
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Reflection

Some of the streets here in Kanata are named after famous people. They made a contribution to Ottawa through their skill in business. There is: Campeau Drive after Robert Campeau, who built neighbourhoods; Terrence Matthews Crescent after the founder of Mitel and Newbridge Networks; Michael Cowpland Drive after the founder of Corel. National leaders are honoured downtown by statues; prime ministers and others who struggled to build the country. People build memorials to their leaders, but though beautiful, they don't always last. We saw that last week with the Confederate statues coming down, and wonder what will be next. In the face of uncertainty we can be sure of this: the continuance of the Church led by the bishops with the pope at their head: "the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

In today's Gospel, "Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Phillipi." The city was at the base of Mount Hermon, a towering snow-covered mountain; the source of the Jordan River. Philip II founded it in 3 BC. Later he called it Caesarea after the Roman emperor Augustus. People referred to it as Caesarea Phillipi, Caesarea of Philip. They needed to distinguish it from another city named Caesarea located on the Mediterranean Sea.

This was the backdrop where Jesus heard Peter's confession of faith.

Isa 22:15, 19-23
Ps 138
Rom 11:33-36
Mt 16:13-20

They were at the gates of a new city founded by a member of a wicked ruling family: half-brothers who struggled lethally for power, curried Roman favor, married and divorced their nieces, and took each other's wives. It was named after Philip, who married Salome after she won the head of John the Baptist through her dance. It was named after Caesar Augustus, who brought peace through power, and gained power through war; the self-styled *Imperator Caesar Divi Filius Augustus*; Augustus, victorious commander, emperor, son of a god. Before this city, they gazed at the mountain from which flowed the life-blood of Israel, the waters of the Jordan River, whose waters became the source of eternal life through the baptism of Jesus. There they pondered his question: "But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

Simon did not answer based on what he heard and saw; words of love and signs of power: "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." He was inspired by God to see through the veil of Jesus' humanity, to grasp in an instant and with total conviction the truth of his being; a supernatural revelation that Teresa of Avila would call an "intellectual vision (Interior Castle, VI.8)." This inspiration confirmed that Simon was chosen by God to wield authority, like Eliakim in the first reading: "I will commit your authority to his hand."

So at the base of the mountain, Jesus said, "I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church." God had said about Eliakim, that "he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah." But Peter's authority would surpass those narrow borders to reach the whole Church, and would stretch beyond his life to be carried on by his successors, the popes. Jesus gave to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven: authority to forgive sin with steadfast love; to pronounce doctrine with faithfulness; to discipline the Church with regard for the lowly.

With this authority, the college of bishops with the pope at their head lead the Church on its journey. "For the true City of the saints is in heaven, though here on earth it produces citizens in whom it wanders as on a pilgrimage through time looking for the Kingdom of eternity. When that day comes it will gather together all those who, rising in their bodies, shall have that Kingdom given to them in which, along with their Prince, the King of Eternity, they shall reign for ever and ever (City of God, XV.1)." So for this Eucharist, we pray the Pope's intention for the month of August: "That artists of our time, through their ingenuity, may help everyone discover the beauty of creation."