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**The Son of the Living God**    The Chair of St. Peter the Apostle    Friday, February 22, 2019  
1 Pt 5:1-4;    **Mt 16:13-19**    (Healing Mass)    (Nothing will prevail against this Church that is  
the body of Christ rooted in the belief that he, Jesus, is the Son of the living God.)

**“Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

Now the context of today’s gospel story is Jesus canvassing his apostles about what people were thinking about him. **“Son of Man”** is a way of saying “me” in the third person. It’s as if a mother would say to some child, “Now tell Mommy what’s wrong with you?” So **it’s third person; he’s asking about himself.** But the response or **the responses are all nonsense.** John the Baptist—Jesus is John the Baptist? Yes, apparently some people thought so. Herod did, if you recall. “Others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or another prophet.” Why can’t Jesus be seen as he is, utterly unique, not anybody else, but who he is and something completely new and different? **You see these answers don’t admit for any possible new and different,** just more of the same, but that’s not correct.

So Peter says, “You are the Christ.” Well that’s a little generic; it means you are the Messiah, and Jews expected a very powerful Messiah, more or less on the political side however, but that’s not so important. But then here: “The Son of the living God”—that’s the kernel of truth. **That’s the real profession of faith that Jesus is the “Son of the living God,” totally unique,** not like anyone who has ever been before, a new category altogether actually, “Son of the living God.” Nobody was ever Son of the living God. So that’s the first thing we have to keep in mind. And the second is that **it is on this confession that the Church is built; it rests on this foundation.** It doesn’t rest on Peter the man. It rests upon Peter’s rock-like confession that Jesus is the Son of the living God.

Now in the world today there are **billions of people who do not believe that.** Naturally non-Christians don’t believe that, because if they did, they would be Christians, but naturally they

don't. Naturally Jews don't believe it; the Muslims don't believe it, naturally. But sadly, **many Christians really don't believe it either.** They say they are Christians, but they think of Jesus as, oh a wonderful person, oh a man of great virtue, a man of great wisdom, a man of great mercy. Well that's all true, but that is not who he is. Who he is is the Son of the living God, and there would be no Church worth having were it not for that. And **our faith again has to be resting on that profession, on that confession, that Jesus is the Son of living God, and that through Jesus we have access to the Father and we have access to the Holy Spirit,** because Jesus is the Son of the living God.

Now the living God has created everything that is, and nothing exists that was not created by the living God and sustained by the living God. But Jesus is the very Son of the living God, the very Word of the living God, and therefore **it's through Jesus that we really can enter into the inner mystery of who God is.** And that's exactly what God wants us to do, has invited us to do. This is why Jesus built a Church. **He built a Church so that we can become enfolded into the life of the living God.**

Now **there is absolutely nothing about our lives that is not important to God,** but that does not mean that what is important to us is important to God. Everything about our lives is important to God, but not necessarily in the order we put them. One of the things we need to do is **try to let God put our lives in the right order.** And sometimes—sometimes—a **crisis, personal or family crisis, might help us at least recognize our need for some radical change in the way we have been living,** in the priorities we have been serving, in the attitudes we have allowed to reign over our minds.

Jesus says here that about his Church “the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.” Well that's a statement of great promise, of great confidence. **What are the gates of the**

**netherworld?** I'm not sure exactly how we should think about that, but I believe what is meant here is that **the powers of evil are not just something we need to avoid through life and then finally in death. Rather in a way they are coming for us all the time.** The powers of evil are on the march against us. This explains the precarious position that holy people have always had in the world. **Holy people**, saintly people, including prophets, have always had a precarious place in the world because **evil always is on the lookout for them and is planning some kind of attack.** And we can see this in our own lives. Sometimes it comes through let's say occasioned by accidents, illnesses, disappointments, failures, mishaps, and even sometimes bad luck. Those might be **occasions that evil uses to get into our minds and start playing havoc.** But Jesus said that his Church that is founded on this confession that he is the Son of the living God, that Church will never be overcome by the power of evil, which is called here in this translation "the gates of the netherworld." **The gates of the netherworld will never prevail"—never.**

So we have faith and now **we have to have hope**, because Jesus has assured us, not only who he is and who we are, who we are called to be, but **that God's will and purpose in our lives will prevail, although he doesn't say how.** They prevailed in his life too, his human life, but **not without** extraordinary suffering. But "Jesus did not deem equality with God something to grasp at, but rather he surrendered it," and he accepted our lot, which is a lot of being vulnerable, mortal, subject to decay and death and corruption. And Jesus accepted that for himself. And not only that, **he even accepted the cross.**

Now why did he do that? He did that to show us the way, the way to trust and the way to hope, to realize that **no matter what happens to us, it couldn't be worse than the cross**, and to keep in mind that the gates of the netherworld, the powers of evil, will never prevail against his Church founded on the rock, the belief, the conviction, **the confession that Jesus is the Son of the living**

**God. And when this faith really takes root in our hearts and starts to grow and gets stronger and we start to live it out**, choosing every day according to it, not according to something we might like or wish or want or desire, but according to what God has ordained and is calling us to, when we start living that way, **we will find a new freedom**, because as Jesus says in the Gospel of John, “The truth will make you free.” Jesus here never promises a life without suffering, a life without trials, a life without challenges—never, but **he does promise victory**. Nothing will prevail against this Church that is the body of Christ rooted in the belief that he, Jesus, is the Son of the living God. And that’s the faith we need to grow and develop and nurture and celebrate and share.