

## 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Fr. Rex Arnold**

I had lunch last week with a friend and colleague, Shane Hall, who is the pastor of First Southern Baptist church in Del City. I like to tell people that I'm the pastor of First Southern Catholic Church in Yukon. Brother Shane and I have been trying for nearly 4 years to catch up, but life gets busy and so I was very grateful when he took the time to drive over for lunch. Brother Shane is 46, he and his wife have two beautiful girls. The reason we've had trouble reconnecting is because 3 years ago he was diagnosed with stomach cancer and the doctors gave him less than 7 months to live and so he was spending a lot of time at MD Anderson in Houston. As part of his treatment they completely removed his stomach and connected his esophagus directly to his small intestine. Since he can't swallow anything but small sips of water, he takes nutrition intravenously. I didn't know all this when I asked him what sounded good for lunch. But in his good natured, unassuming manner, he said anything sounds good, I do like local places, especially since I can't swallow food. I just chew up the food and deposit it back into a plastic cup that you can't see through, if you're ok with that.? Well, Of course I was not ok with that, but of course I said that I was. But I told myself if he can't eat because he doesn't have a stomach, then I can surely stomach the only way he can eat. As we sat and visited, he shared some of his physical and spiritual roller coaster ride with me. Last year he was declared cancer free. This year the cancer has come back and he has started treatment again. Shane is 6'1" and weighs 115 lbs. When I asked his permission to share his story he said, Feel free to use my name and any part of my story. I am a skinny, open book. I am thankful that God can use it to possibly encourage and strengthen your people. Please let them know I am praying for them now!! And I will pray intentionally for them at your three weekend mass times. Brother Shane is not focused on himself. He wanted to see my parish and meet the staff and was sincerely interested in them and their ministry. The only time he talked about himself is when I directed the conversation about him. Before he left, I asked him what was one of the greatest encounters he's had with God during this time? He said I would never wish this on anyone and I never asked God for cancer, but My wife and I prayed together that whatever God wanted, whatever He desires, we were willing to do it and endure it, for Him. Then He said, be careful what you pray for. But Shane said this cancer has been the greatest gift of his life. He said I serve at the pleasure of the King. Whatever he wills or wants is what I want. The blessings that have poured down from heaven during this time of suffering has drawn him closer to Christ than anything else in his ministry or in his life. That openness and courage can only come from truly knowing the king that he serves.

When Jesus asked the question, "Who do people say that I am?" What would your answer be? They said He was a great preacher, missionary or scholar. We might say He was a man wise beyond his years. Or he helps me when I ask him for it, Or he was a super hero of his day. And then Jesus asked but who do you say that I am?

Our answer all depends on who we serve. If I can say, I serve at the pleasure of the king, then my service will not always involve pleasure. Just the opposite. It will involve most things that Jesus

experienced, incredible joy and peace and fulfillment but also sacrifice, pain disappointment, misunderstanding.

When Peter gave his answer of who Jesus was, He said “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus said to him in reply, “Blessed are you,

Something happens to us when we acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. We become blessed. We become different from before. When I make the decision to acknowledge Christ as the Lord over my life, And I start saying, I serve at the pleasure of the King, something happens inside of me, something changes. Jesus begins to govern my thoughts, my tongue, my attitudes, he chooses my friends, what I read and watch, he takes over my heart, he manages what I own and helps me to share and allows me the freedom to be detached from material things, but at the same time to be grateful for all things. That blessing helps us to shift the "look at me" spotlight away from yourself and back onto the "look at Jesus" no matter what is happening to us physically or spiritually. What a blessing. For us Christians, that blessing comes with a change in our identity and as Catholics at our Confirmation, we get a new Christian name.

As Simon gets a new identity, Jesus gives him a new name. He is no longer Simon the fisherman who has been following Jesus around with a bunch of other guys who are obviously fascinated by Jesus and what He stands for. Simon becomes Peter the Rock. Long before Dwayne Johnson. Jesus declares Peter the rock and foundation of His Church. This is not just another world religion, or movement or program. He's not an administrator or Overseer. Jesus establishes with Peter, the Petrine Office, the unique ability to govern souls. He is given the keys to the kingdom of heaven but with instructions on what they are to be used for.

Keys are highly symbolic. I have a master key to every door in this parish. Or at least that's what Mr. Kastl allows me to think. If I chose to show everyone that I have the master key, that I am the one with the ability to let you in or keep you out, then the spotlight is on me. It's about my power over you.

Like Shebna in Isaiah who wears his huge key over his shoulder like a badge of power that says, look at me, See how important I am, look at me, I'm in charge and you're not. God took that power from Shebna, the Master of the Palace, and gave it to Eliakim, who he called the reliable peg that could bear much weight, and clothed him with the robe, and sash, and gave over to him authority to be a father of Jerusalem. God says, “I will place the key of the House of David on Eliakim’s shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open.” Jesus calls Simon, Peter the rock, on which he will build His church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

This biblical basis for St. Peter as the first of 266 popes, with the robes and sash, and Master of the Palace, shows us that he is the rock for the flock and father of the Church until Christ returns.

It may be hard for us at times to stomach the fallible men and women who serve the king in His palace, but Jesus says the gates of death will never prevail over the infallibility of the Holy Spirit that guides our faith and morals of His church.

Jesus asks us,

Who do you say that I am?

Is the spotlight always on me ?

Do I need to be in charge or keep the attention centered around me, my ministry and I?

Who am I serving?

The keys to being a blessing are unlocked when we are forgiven by the Church of the Christ, the Son of the living God. When we serve at the pleasure of the king then we become the Blessing.