
Did you ever have one of those moments in your life, when ‘the stars came into alignment – Jupiter was aligned with Mars,’ the clouds rolled away, and you were hit as if a bolt of lightning, and you exclaimed, “Aha! That’s the answer! By Jove, I’ve got it. That’s the ticket. Eureka! I have found it! “Watson, come here!”

Actually, it happens to me more and more every day, only now it is when I find two socks that match, or I remember why I came downstairs to the kitchen, or I get in the car and remember who I going to visit or what I was going to the store to buy. Aha! One 16 oz. can of creamed corn, preferably Del Monte, not bananas, bread or ice cream – creamed corn! Aha!

Sometimes, when we least expect it, God will deliver us a note of revealed truth, an ‘Aha’, slightly more insight into the Divine Wisdom, manna from Heaven, remembering that “manu” is a Hebrew word for the question, “What is it?” So even our answers can lead to deeper questions of existential exploration.

As I have often said, Simon Peter is one of my favorite Biblical characters and my favorite disciple of the original twelve. In today’s reading from Matthew, we hear how he got his new name, or perhaps nickname, “Peter,” “the Rock.” Have any Pete’s or a Peter in your family? I have a cousin, Peter Elftmann, built big and solid, like a rock, and just as jolly as he is big. I wonder if his father, the Presbyterian minister, looked upon him as baby and said, now there is a “rock” of a child?

Peter was not used as a personal name in the Old Testament or even Jesus’ time. So Jesus’ appears to have come up with this one on his own. According to the U.S. Social Security web site, Peter is currently the 192nd most popular male baby name. Forty years ago it was 39th. ‘Steven’ by the way is at 118 and was #13 most popular when I was born, topping charts in the late fifties at #10. Oh well.

Back to our story, Jesus, who currently is the #92 most popular U.S. male baby names, asks his disciples, now that they have come ashore in the Gentile Caesarea Philippi, after a stormy night at sea, and an eventful “water-walk”, Jesus asks, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is (referring to himself)?”

Son of Man, by the way, means in Hebrew, “human being,” and Matthew is saying something more important about Jesus. He is saying Jesus is a human being straight from God.

So the disciples give him various speculative answers of the people, such as John the Baptist, Elijah (the prophet who was expected to come back) or Jeremiah, one of the more famous prophets of Judah. Personally, I would be afraid to ask you all to go in Bright out and inquire who people think I am. “Oh, you mean the bald guy that comes into the market and buys one pork chop and the Sunday Enquirer?” Or “you mean the rounded fellow in the park with the red hat, listening to his iPod while he walks?” Or more likely “Who?”

No, Jesus had good reason by this point in his ministry to believe that there were various speculations about who he was. He is really setting the disciples up for a pop quiz on Christology? “But, who do y’all (plural - we say in my region) say that I am?”

Peter, God bless him, serves once again as the spokesperson for the group of twelve. And his response, slightly longer here than in Mark or Luke, is “You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God.” Matthew adds or includes “Son of the living God.” And this is known generally in New Testament circles, as “Peter’s Confession” or even “The Great Confession.”
In my first faith tradition, that of the Christian Church, in Kentucky, when a young person became about 12 years of age, they underwent a period of study much like our confirmation class and then, if ready, made their “Confession of Faith” and were baptized into the Church. I can remember well, standing before my pastor, Rev. Reed Carter, and having him ask me, “Steve, do you accept Jesus as the Christ, the son of the living God, and ask him to come into your life as your personal Lord and Savior?” I said ‘yes’ and shook his hand, the “right hand of Christian fellowship.” And that was that. Jesus and I have been reasonably close ever since. And the Church has not been far from me either.

That moment of confession, or confirmation, or re-birth, if you prefer, is a key “Aha moment” in the life of the Christian. Bells or whistles may or may not be heard. It might note express your “Aha” faith moment. But as Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Blessed are you Simon” because he is witness that revelation from God in Heaven has occurred for Simon. This is not to be interpreted as Simon’s personal achievement. It is as one scholar puts it, “divine disclosure of the eschatological secret.” God reveals a little more about the Lord Jesus each time the disciples meet and indeed, each time we study the Scriptures and discern the Holy Word. Yet another reason to study Scripture daily.

Simon gets a little closer to a relationship with the Living God in this moment of affirmation and Jesus recognizes it and gives him a new name, he calls him Peter or “Petros” in Greek for “stone or rock”. Actually, since Jesus speaks mostly Aramaic, we believe, he probably calls him “Cephas” for rock, which you may recall is what John’s gospel uses, and so does Paul repeatedly in his writings.

There are many other aspects to this lesson. But this day, let’s concentrate on revealed Word of God coming to each one of us as the Spirit allows and as we are open to receive it. The Church, which is born in some ways in this passage, is not a human achievement. It is not meant to be a fellowship of persons who gather as a support group because they share common beliefs. The Church, representing the foundation built by Christ on disciples like Simon Peter, is meant to be a vehicle through which God gives us revelation into the truth about God, blesses those who receive the revelation with joy, gives us new identities in Christ Jesus, and then sends us forth to continue the work of establishing the Reign of God on earth as it is in Heaven, including authority to make decisions in Jesus’ name.

Alleluia! Amen.