

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles C

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

What do you see when you look at yourself these days? What stands out for you? And what do you wish you could hide? What do you want others to see? And what is the last thing you want them to see?

I ask those questions because I think it is easy to take one aspect or quality of ourselves, a particular time in life, a choice or a series of decisions, something that's happened to us, or something we have done or left undone and let that, better or worse, define and identify us. Perhaps we see ourselves as a one-hit wonder or a three-time loser.

There have been times when I felt like I was the worst thing that I had ever done or the most painful thing that had ever happened to me. At other times, I felt like I was my best accomplishment or success. I have not only seen myself in those ways. Sometimes, that's how I have seen others. Maybe you know what I am talking about. Maybe you felt those things too and saw yourself or another like that.

It is as if we take a snapshot of life, hold it up, and say, "**This is the reality.**" Well, maybe it is at that moment, in that place, under those circumstances, or maybe it is not. Either way, life is much more like a movie than a single photograph.

That means we are neither our best day nor our worst day. We are neither our flaws nor our virtues. None of us are ever just one thing. All of us are a mixture. If there is anyone in the scripture who makes that

point, it is Peter. He is a mixed bag. But so am I. I suppose you are, too. And yet, in today's gospel, Jesus says to Peter, **“You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.”**

I have often thought that Peter's confession of Jesus as **“the Christ, the Son of the living God”** is the rock on which Jesus builds his church and the reason Peter is given the keys of the kingdom. Peter got the answer right. But his confession happened at a particular moment in time, in a specific place, under the circumstances. What if it is really the mixed bag of Peter's life that is the rock on which Jesus builds his church? And what if the mixed bag of Peter's life is the ring on which Jesus hangs the keys of the kingdom?

Have you ever thought of yourself as the rock on which Jesus built his church? Have you considered that maybe Jesus is giving you the keys to the kingdom? Why not? I will bet your life and my life are as much a mixed bag as Peter's. So, let's open the bag of Peter's life and see what we find.

Peter correctly answered Jesus' question, and Jesus said, **“Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah.”** So, what are we to make of the rock and the keeper of the keys when, just four verses later, he will rebuke Jesus, and Jesus will say to him, **“Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me.”** Which is it? Is Peter blessed or Satan? Is he the foundation stone or

an obstacle? Maybe the most we can say is yes, yes, he is. And maybe we are, too.

Peter had enough faith to walk on water and enough fear to sink like a rock. Who among us today doesn't know what it is like to live in the tension between faith and fear?

Sometimes, Peter gets it when nobody else does. When many of Jesus' disciples were turning back, he asked, **"Do you also wish to go away?"** Peter answered him, **"Lord to whom can we go? You have the words of everlasting life. We have come to believe that you are the Holy One of God."** Other times, he didn't get it. **"Explain this parable to us,"** he says. And Jesus answered him, **"Are you still without understanding?"**

You know what that is like, right? I do. Sometimes, I don't know how I know; I just know that I know. At other times, I don't understand; I'm clueless.

Peter often lived at the extremes. He could be stubborn and convinced he knew how things should go. Sometimes, old patterns and beliefs took over in him. Does any of that sound familiar in your life? It is what we see at the foot washing when Peter says, **"You will never wash my feet."** Jesus said, **"Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."** Then Peter wanted everything washed, not just his feet but also his hands and his head.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter says, **"Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish I will make three dwellings here, one for you,**

one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” But just a couple of chapters later, he says to Jesus, **“Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?”** Maybe it is a spectrum we all live on. We have had mountaintop experiences, and we have had days when we wondered if this faith journey is getting us anywhere and what difference it is making.

Peter commits himself to Jesus, saying, **“Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.”** Jesus then takes Peter, James, and John to pray with him in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is grieved and agitated. He wants their presence and prayers, but they promptly fall asleep. Not once, not twice, but three times – a rather ominous number. Peter will, in fact, deny Jesus. Not once, not twice, but three times. It is only when the cock crows that Peter wakes up.

Showing up and being present for another, ourselves, and life is some of our most challenging work. It is so easy to sleepwalk through life.

When they came to arrest Jesus, Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant. What happened to **“blessed are the peacemakers,” “love your enemies,” “turn the other cheek?”** Our swords often contradict Jesus’ gospel of peace and nonviolence.

So, there is the rock on which the church is built. There is the ring on which the keys of the kingdom hang. What do you think?

Here is what strikes me. Jesus never goes to Peter and says, **“Peter, give me back the keys.”** And he never says that to you or me. And never

goes to Peter and says, **“Peter, I think I am going to go find another rock. You are not the one.”** And he never says that to you or me. Peter is the one. So are you. So am I. We are the ones. We are the ones on whom the church is built. We are the ones entrusted with the keys of the kingdom.

And it must mean that there is something about the mixed bags of our lives that the world needs. Jesus sees something in the mixed bag of our lives that has value and purpose, even when we don't or cannot see it. He trusts it more than we do.

What do you see when you look at the mixed bag of your life? When I look in mine, I see faithfulness and commitment, contradictions and inconsistencies, progress and backing up, times when I rose to the occasion, and times when I ran away. I guess that your bag holds similar things. That's what we saw in Peter's bag.

So, what do we do with the mixed bags of our lives? Jesus says to do three things with them. **“Feed my lambs.” “Tend my sheep.” “Feed my sheep.”** That's what he told Peter too. Three times he asks us. I don't think he asks us to do that despite the mixed bag of our life. He asks us knowing that the only way we can do those things, the only way they have meaning and value, is if we do them with and through the mixed bag of our life.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

What does that mean and look like for you today? Tomorrow? Next week and next month? Feeding lambs, tending sheep, and feeding sheep

from the mixed bag of your life. Look deep in the mixed bag of your life.
You and I have something to offer. We are the ones. **Amen.**