

Upon This Rock

Matthew 16:13-20

WHAT WE FOUND

Jesus asked the question in the district of Caesarea Philippi, home to a colossal rock cliff, a shrine of Pan, and a temple to Caesar, a setting many interpreters see as chosen deliberately; and against all of it came Peter's revealed confession: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus' first reply was about the source: "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father" (16:17). Peter's greatest sentence was a grace received, not a deduction achieved. Keep that verse underlined; this study will come back for it.

Then the name from John 1:42 got its job description: "you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." In Aramaic, the language Jesus almost certainly spoke and the source of the name "Cephas" the New Testament itself preserves, it would be one word: you are Kepha, on this kepha I build. We gave the "rock means his confession" reading its full day in court, including St. Augustine's honest both-ways verdict, and found the readings converge: Peter is the rock precisely as the graced confessor. Isaiah had already called renamed Abraham "the rock from which you were hewn" (Isaiah 51:1-2); Kepha stands in that line, under the God who is Rock absolutely.

"The powers of death shall not prevail": gates are defensive architecture, and many readers take the image to mean it is death's fortress under siege, not the Church. And the night ended on a promised gift we deliberately did not open: the keys. Kings do not carry their own keys. Sealed guesses stay sealed until next week.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. John Chrysostom *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, Homily 54*

Chrysostom calls Peter the mouth of the apostles, the one who answers when all are asked, and he marvels at the exchange of confessions: Peter confesses Jesus to be the Son of the living God, and Jesus confesses what Peter shall be, pronouncing blessing on him and founding what no time will overthrow.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage *On the Unity of the Catholic Church, 4*

Cyprian teaches that although the Lord gave power to all the apostles, he built the Church upon one, and by beginning from one made her unity visible. The other apostles were what Peter was, Cyprian says, but the primacy is given to Peter so that the Church of Christ may be shown to be one, a single origin for a single flock.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Leo the Great *Sermon 4, On His Birthday as Pope*

Leo preaches that the strength given to the rock does not fail: in Peter's see, what Peter confessed and what Peter received remain at work, so that the solidity Christ granted the fisherman endures in the office. The Lord, Leo insists, remains the true builder; Peter is strong because Christ makes him so, and never apart from him.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Pray with Matthew 16:13-20 once this week using *lectio divina*: read it three times slowly and answer the Lord's question out loud, alone, in your own words.

2.

Find a photo of the rock cliff and Pan grotto at Caesarea Philippi (search Banias, Israel) and look at it while rereading the passage. Note what changes when you can see the stage.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, and add one line in your own words asking Christ to keep his Church unshaken this week.

MEMORY VERSE

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Do not read ahead in the prophets; let next week's discovery be a discovery. Instead, reread **Matthew 16:13-20** once more and **2 Kings 18:17-18, 26, 37**, and simply notice a job title that keeps appearing: "who was over the household."

Catechism Connection: CCC 424; 442; 552