

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus asked his disciples, Who do you say that I am? After giving a response to what others have said about him, that he is perhaps John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets, St. Peter confesses a glorious truth. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. This truth is the truth that the Church is built upon. It is the truth that leads to everlasting life; it is this truth that is only revealed by the working of the Holy Spirit. St. Peter did not come to this realization by himself. On this day, as we commemorate St. Peter and St. Paul as the titans of the faith that they are, we must always remember that what they confessed, not what they did, and who they reached, is what sets them apart. It is not according to their own flesh that we celebrate this day, but because of the flesh of Christ, the Son of the Living God. It is not because they were such great and wonderful people. All that they had, all that they are, is given to them by Christ. And we would do well to remember this also.

For you suffer from the same thing that all man does. The temptation and inclination towards thinking of mankind as the center of the universe. That around us circles the heavens; around us the universe spins. But who is Peter? Who is Paul? They are but grass, they like the rest of man fade and wither according to their sin.

Jesus reminds Peter of this as he says, Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. That the Father reveals the Son through the Holy Spirit. And it is this that makes Peter's confession so great. It is outside of human reason, it is outside of human strength and will, but it is pure gift given to him by the Father. It is upon this confession that the Church is built. It is not upon Peter, but upon the person of Christ, the eternal Son of the Father is at the center of the Church. It is around Christ that the church gathers, it is around the body and blood of the eternally begotten Son.

The confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, in this, the Church finds her being; the Church finds her genesis in this confession. Apart from this truth it is nothing. But with this truth, revealed by the Father, the gates of hell will not prevail against her. The Church that holds to

this confession can never lose. Satan will throw all that he has against her. And yet, the Church is victorious.

We have a wonderful blessing here in this place. To have such beautiful walls, windows, chancel, nave, building, and an organ. A building thought out and making a confession about what it is that we believe. But do not take stock in all that. Christ does not promise that this will all endure. It is a blessing to have, to be sure, but it can become an idol. The Church that prevails against the gates of hell is not this building, it is not this congregation. Does Christ not warn the disciples as they marveled at the great stones of the temple? This will all come crashing down one day. Marvel not simply at how beautiful our building is; marvel not at how great a pastor you may have; but see in these things the reason they are given, to point and direct you to your Lord, and this confession of St. Peter. To bring into your heart and mind the center of all of St. Paul's writings, the atonement won for you upon the cross. Likewise, fear not, if it all fades away, if the steeple crumbles and the doors rot off of their hinges; fear not if some schmuck is sent to be your pastor. The church of God will endure all of this and it will not be toppled. For it is not about all of that. The word of the Lord endures forever, Christ endures forever, and upon the confession of Christ, the church is built. The church is not the stones and steeples, it is not even the people. The church is where the word of God is preached in its truth and purity, and the sacraments are administered rightly.

The church is where Christ is confessed and where Christ is present in bread and wine for you. This is what the hordes of hell will not prevail against. They will not prevail against Christ. For Christ is the Lord of the Church; He is her head and her center. He is her source. And the forces of hell have done their worst to Him already. They have given all that they have to destroy him, and have only found themselves destroyed. Christ is risen from the dead, he has trampled down death by death and bestows to his church life. His life, that hell could not extinguish.

The Bible describes the church as something that is otherworldly, something that comes down from heaven. The Bible describes the church as something that is heavenly and mystical, and divine, the very body of Christ himself. And the Bible says that this church is built not upon stones, but upon

the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone, with the promise that because of who Jesus is, the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church. Even when steeples fall, the church endures. Even when congregations explode, either literally or figuratively, the church endures. When congregations close, the church endures. When pastors fail or when laity don't care, the church endures.

Jesus calls us to place our trust in him but also to place our trust today, he says, in the one holy Christian and apostolic church as an article of faith that we even tack onto the end of the creed. We confess, I believe in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and I believe in the one holy Christian and apostolic church.

The church, capital C, is not an institution. It is not even a building. Christianity is not a hobby. Our faith is not some pastime. Instead, it is worth dying for, dying to ourselves, dying to the world, and dying in real life. It is the mystical heavenly body of Christ against which the gates of hell cannot and will not prevail. It is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,

So take heart, rejoice, and love your Church. Just because all of this around you may one day crumble and fall, just because the doors of this congregation may shut one day, does not mean it is for naught. No, adorn the house of God with beautiful things, for this is where Christ dwells for you. And how we use it is a confession of what we believe. Let us then confess with St. Peter and St. Paul that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and we will know nothing other than Him and his crucifixion. For here in this building, the Son of the living God is present. And if hell should take our building, gather anyway, for the church does not need the building but finds her life in Christ, whom death and hell cannot destroy.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.