

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

We have a church full of students and parents and teachers today, in addition to our regular members. How wonderful! We invite you to come and be with us often.

You know that Jesus was a teacher. Andrew, who later became a disciple, called Him “*Rabbi,*” and John tells us that *rabbi* “*means Teacher*” (John 1:38). Andrew, his brother Simon Peter, James, and John, and so forth all became Jesus’ disciples (μαθητής), and that means student, pupil, learner. How appropriate to talk about our teacher and His students today.

Jesus was a teacher, a master teacher at that, better than the ordinary teacher. He could lecture — in church we call them sermons. After His great Sermon on the Mount, we hear how “*the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes*” (Matt. 7:28-29).

As a teacher, Jesus had a goal for His students, as your teachers have for you students. Some of the standards we have in school have been set by the state, but Jesus had His own goal, namely to prepare His students first to acknowledge who He is; second, to acknowledge why He came; and third, to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name.

Now Jesus didn’t have the modern tools that our teachers use today — iPads and computers, Smartboards, etc. — but He used many of the same techniques. One I already mentioned: he lectured — an educational talk addressed especially to students.

Jesus didn’t just teach His disciples, but large crowds often gathered to Him. Jesus would often address these large gatherings with little stories that had a special spiritual meaning; we call them parables. The people didn’t always understand them; even His disciples didn’t. But Jesus would explain them later to the disciples. Don’t your teachers do that? They teach the whole class; then they may come around to students individually and explain hard-to-understand concepts.

Jesus would often demonstrate things to His students. The Scriptures are full of such demonstrations: cleansing a leper, healing a paralyzed servant, casting out fevers and demons and unclean spirits, making the lame to walk, giving sight to the blind, even raising the dead. He demonstrated these things not to teach His disciples to do the same, but to teach them who He is! That’s the answer He gave to John the Baptist, who had been imprisoned and wondered: “*Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another*” (Matt. 11:3). He pointed John to these mighty signs and wonders.

Jesus did more than healing miracles on people, He demonstrated His power over the creation — stilling a storm, multiplying bread and fish to feed the multitudes, walking on water. Again, He did these things not to show the disciples

how to reproduce them. We did hear recently how Peter walked on the water, but that wasn't by his power; it was by Jesus' power. And when Peter doubted and looked away from Jesus, He began to sink into the sea. No, Jesus didn't do these things to teach the disciples how to do them, but to show them who He is. The disciples in the boat saw and proclaimed: "*Truly you are the Son of God*" (Matt. 14:33). They were starting to get it.

Again, Jesus, the master teacher, did what all good teachers do. He had His disciples practice for what would lie ahead of them. And so, He sent them out to preach and teach. He gave them strict instructions: where they were to go, what they were to say. He even gave them special powers for a time to heal and cleanse and cast out, and even raise the dead. And He told them what to expect as a response. They returned marveling.

Not everyone came to understand rightly who Jesus is. Many people marveled at His teaching and miracles. But some people accused Jesus of casting out demons by "*the prince of demons*" (Matt. 12:24). Others scoffed at Him: "This is a hometown boy, the son of a carpenter, whose mother and brothers and sisters we know. He's nobody special!" But Jesus continued His teaching ministry.

Jesus also did, again, what good teachers do. He gave them a little quiz. Good teachers use questions to get students to say what they know and to decide what to teach next. Jesus did that in our Gospel. Actually, you could call it a bit of the Socratic method. (Our teachers know a bit about that.) Jesus asked first, "*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*" Remember, not all the people were understanding rightly. Thus, the disciples answered: "*Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*" They had probably heard the more negative things people were saying, too, but they didn't tell Jesus those.

That question, actually, wasn't too difficult; He asked only for a report. The next question was more difficult, more probing, more emphatic. This was getting to the goal of all that Jesus had been teaching the disciples. Jesus asked them, "*But YOU ALL, who do YOU ALL say that I am?*"

What happened next surely happens in our classrooms, too. Although teachers want their students to raise their hands and wait to be called on, a bright and eager student will sometimes blurt out the answer. Peter was that bright and eager student in our text. Answering for the rest of the disciples, Peter offered his great confession: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"

And a blessed confession it was, melding together these two titles, these two offices, into the one person of Jesus. Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, chosen from the foundation of the world to come as our Savior, our King and our liege Lord. He was born of royal stock, of the line of David, conceived by the Holy

Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, that He might reign on “*the throne of his father David*” in a “*kingdom [that has] no end*” (Luke 1:32-33). But Jesus is also the Son of God, very God Himself, who was with God in the beginning, and by whom all things were made (John 1:1-3). He is God’s Son, descended from the Father’s side to take on our flesh, becoming Immanuel, “*God with us*” (Matt. 1:23), the first step toward effecting our salvation.

Now, Jesus would have to teach the disciples much more of what lay ahead of Him, things that Peter would find difficult to hear and accept: His betrayal, suffering, death, resurrection. Your teachers do the same thing; they give you what is age appropriate, what you can handle before moving on to the next thing. Peter had just confessed who Jesus was; Jesus would continue on with the things of Jesus’ passion, which would complete God’s purpose for sending Jesus as the Christ.

And after they had all happened, Peter would boldly proclaim them along with their purpose: your forgiveness; life eternal. Moreover, we, having been taught them, now confess them boldly as Peter might have: we believe in our “Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, ... very God of very God ... [who] was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again” (Nicene Creed).

But how did Peter know all this, after all, what he confessed was divine, not ordinary knowledge. What he confessed was not something that can be hypothesized and tested like you might do in science class. “*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways*” (Rom. 11:33)! No, this kind of knowledge must be revealed, and the Father in heaven had been revealing it to Peter and the disciples, through Jesus’ own teaching and mighty wonders, and through special revelations like, for example, to John the Baptist when the Spirit descended upon Jesus, and the Father spoke from heaven: “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*” (Matt. 3:17).

Not only that, but this knowledge — this confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God — is the Rock upon which the church is built ... as we just sang. St. Paul confesses it this way: “*you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone*” (Eph. 2:19-20). To be sure, Jesus calls Peter — Πέτρος — which means rock. But he is not the πέτρα rock upon which Jesus says the church is built, for “the Church is the congregation of saints and true believers” (AC, VIII:1), and “[We] know [our] faith is founded On Jesus Christ, [our] God and Lord” (LSB587:1).

Yes, Jesus Himself is our Lord, and, as David sings, He is “[our] rock and [our] fortress and [our] deliverer, [our] God, [our] rock, in whom [we] take refuge, [our] shield, and the horn of [our] salvation, [our] stronghold” (Ps. 18:2). This, too, Scripture teaches, and this is what we confess. And built on this Rock, we will stand, for we have His promise. The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church, any more than the devil himself could prevail against Jesus. In Jesus, we have the victory over sin and death and the power of the devil. This is the knowledge that strengthens our faith and gives us hope here in time for there in eternity.

Thanks be to God for what Jesus, master teacher, has taught us — and Peter and the rest of the apostles and prophets, too — of who He is and what He has done. We confess Him as Peter did: He is “*the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” We praise Him, and we rejoice in Him, for in Christ, we, too, are called blessed.

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