

**Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez for the
Mass for Communio et Liberatione Movement
Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine
June 29, 2013**

*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?
Who do you say that I am?*

These were the questions Jesus asked of his first followers in our Gospel reading today. He asked them what they were hearing then and tested their understanding of his identity, in contrast with the world's understanding. It was Peter who responded first: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Peter's passion for Jesus Christ opened his mind to the Father, who revealed this truth about the Son.

I welcome this gathering of Communion et Liberation, U.S.A. today on the most sacred Catholic solemnity in this historic Cathedral-Basilica. I respect your movement especially because of its founder, Father Luigi Giusani who excelled in giving reasons to believe in our times. In the context of an emerging culture threatened by a new atheism, the dictatorship of relativism spreading in our educational centers and the media, Father Giusani rethought deeply the faith received and formulated a new a credible apologetic for our young adults and the entire church enabling our faith to shine in post modernity. Let me quote him on this matter:

Return to the elemental aspects of Christianity.

"The genius of the movement whose birth I witnessed is that it felt the urgency of proclaiming the need to return to the elemental aspects of Christianity. By this I mean a passion for Christian reality as such in its original elements, and nothing more."¹ *Luigi Giussani, Communion and Liberation.*

Let us examine these words of Father Giussani and our readings today. The world needed the authentic witness of Christians everywhere when Communion and Liberation began. The world still needs this witness today. What does it mean to return to the elemental aspects of Christianity? Father Giussani gave us an answer: "a passion for Christian reality as such in its original elements, and nothing more."

On this feast of Saints Peter and Paul, we remember two great figures of our early church, both martyred for their fidelity to our Lord Jesus Christ. Our readings take us back to Christian reality in its original elements.

The first reading places us with Peter, one of Christ's first followers. James was already killed by Herod and Peter was captured and imprisoned. Peter was liberated by an angel of God from King

¹ 2004 letter from Luigi Giussani to Pope John Paul II on 50th anniversary of Communion and Liberation

Herod's grasp. The chapter ends with Herod's death at the hands of God's angel, *and the word of God continued to spread and grow* (Acts 12:24).

In our second reading, Paul compactly sums up everything he has been exhorting St. Timothy to follow: bear your share of hardship for the Gospel; be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; an athlete cannot receive the winner's crown except by competing according to the rules; if we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him.

Our gospel is the lynchpin upon which our two readings hinge – it asks and answers two questions: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is? Who do you say that I am?” Saints Peter and Paul tirelessly proclaimed Jesus to the world as it was revealed to them – through Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They catechized future followers, echoing the teaching, transmitting the Gospel as the Christian community received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways (General Directory for Catechesis #105). This is what we are called to do today – to carry that 2,000 year old echo forward into the 21st century.

Here in the Diocese of St. Augustine, Our Lady is revered under the title of La Leche and is an elemental aspect of Christianity, both in the history of Catholicism in this country and in salvation history. She was the first Christ-follower. Her soul magnified the Lord, her body helped bring him forth. Her experience of and embrace of her motherhood of Jesus was her witness. That is precisely the message of “La leche.” As Blessed John Paul called her, “the Eucharistic woman:” the Christ that is given to us in the Eucharist is essentially linked to the Mother of God, his body and blood which we enter into communion is Mary's gift to us as well. She remains a model to us of true, elemental, and passionate Christianity in its original elements, and nothing more. May we remember to turn to her in all our endeavors, as she will always lead us back to her Son?