

Imagine yourself as one of Jesus' disciples in today's Gospel. Jesus came to make all things new, that is, He came to restore all things to the way God intended them to be. That means He has to teach us how to live in such a way that it accords with God's will. And that is what He has been doing for for the last couple of weeks, teaching His disciples how to walk with God and live a God-centered life.

He tells us we must be as humble and innocent as children, that we must go out of our way to bring the lost sheep back into the fold, that we must correct our brothers and sisters who have sinned against us, and we must forgive.

Now imagine yourself hearing this teaching for the first time. Rabbinic law required that if a person sinned against you, that person was to be forgiven. But only three times for the same offense, a fourth time was not forgiven. So it is easy to imagine the disciples discussing the teachings of Jesus among themselves.

How many times must we go out and search for the lost sheep? How far should we go to reconcile with those who have sinned against us?

Perhaps Peter thought he was beginning to understand, maybe we should forgive each other up to seven times, rather than the three required. So he had a question, he needed clarification, and rather than trust on his own understanding, he brought his question Jesus, he brought his question to God.

We live pretty complicated lives. Questions arise and doubts and difficulties confuse us. So we look to an authority for answers. Unfortunately we don't always look for answers in the right place. We have a tendency, left over from Original sin, to try and fix everything ourselves. Sometimes we rely on our own understanding and sometimes we look to another whom we respect.

But our human understanding always falls short. That is why Jesus came to remind us that we are created in the image and likeness of God. That our bond with God is like the bond between a parent and child. If we have questions we need to look to God for the answers. We need to measure all things according to Christ's standards. We need to bring our questions to Him just as Peter did. Jesus is the final Word God has spoken to us. And He continues to answer our questions through

His Church. That is why He established the Church in the first place and sent His Spirit to guide it, so that He may continue to teach us and answer our questions, through the Church, guided by the Spirit.

In Jesus we find the answers to all our problems and dilemmas. So we need to follow Peter's example. We should bring our questions to the Lord in prayer. We should cast the light of the Church's teachings on our own moral and intellectual quandaries. And then, like Peter, we should accept Christ's solution.

Our greatest saints knew this. We study the lives of the saints because they continue to teach us by their example.

About ten years ago there was a surge in interest in the life of St. Hildegard of Bingen. Saint Hildegard was an amazing woman, she was a writer, a composer, a philosopher, a mystic, a visionary and what we call today a polymath, she was knowledgeable and skilled in a variety of disciplines.

Hildegard was born into a noble German family in the middle ages. From an early age she consecrated her life to God. Eventually she became an abbess of a Benedictine monastery. That meant she was responsible for not only the spiritual welfare of her sisters, but also responsible for the day to day operations of her community.

All of this caught the attention of modern day feminists who seized upon her as a patron and role model for accomplished and independent women. But when they began to study Hildegard's life more closely they were unpleasantly surprised at what they found.

Besides her attractive virtue and her wisdom in growing her monastery, St. Hildegard was also given the mystical privilege of visions and private revelations. And that's when her life got ... complicated.

It is easy to imagine how this would play out today. If you start receiving visions, you write a book, get an agent, go on a speaking tour, get on TV, build a brand around yourself and start raking in the cash.

But that was not what St. Hildegard did.

When St. Hildegard began having her visions and revelations she was afraid that they were tricks of the devil. She needed answers to what was happening in her life.

So she recorded her visions and took them to her spiritual director. Then she sent them to one of the other great saints of the time, St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Finally they were submitted to the pope, who authorized her to publish her writings widely and speak publicly about all that God was showing her.

This determined and humble submission to Christ's authority, as delegated to the Church, not only brought peace to her soul, but it also allowed her personal gifts to bear fruit for the whole Church.

In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI said of Hildegard “This dear friends, is the seal of an authentic experience of the Holy Spirit, the source of every charism: the person endowed with supernatural gifts never boasts of them, never flaunts them and, above all, shows complete obedience to the ecclesial authority. Every gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit is in fact intended for the edification of the Church and the Church, through her pastors, recognizes its authenticity.”

In October of 2012, Pope Benedict named St. Hildegard of Bingen, a doctor of the Church.

How do we use the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us? Do we hoard them, and use them for our own gain? Or do we submit to the authority of the Church and use them for the edification of our brothers and sisters?

Recognizing the authority of the Church, particularly in matters of faith and morals, let alone how we are to use our gifts, is not popular these days. Often we are accused of following Church teaching blindly, without understanding. But God does not want slaves who do the right thing because the Church “tells them to.” God wants us to live our lives in faith, and He gives us the Church, not as a totalitarian dictator, but as a resource, a Divine Institution. God give us His church as a mother.

As a mother the Church wants only for her children to grow up good, and true, and virtuous. And she guides us in how to do so.

And we need guidance. Our lives are complicated, tangled with dilemmas, questions, and problems. It is through the Church that Jesus continues to teach us. But in order for Him to teach us we must make the decision to allow Him to do so. St. Paul told us that “None of us lives for oneself, and none of us dies for oneself.” In other words, in order to fill our lives with the light and strength of Jesus, we have to decide to live and die for Jesus, to belong to Jesus. We have to give our lives to Him.

Considering all that we have to gain, not the least of which is peace to our souls, why would we not do this? There may be a couple of reasons.

We may feel we are unworthy of this due to our sins, but the Gospel tells us that God's mercy is unlimited, if only we are willing to confess our sins and accept His forgiveness.

We may be afraid of giving up our own plans and hopes, but God's plans and hopes are infinitely more wonderful than anything we could come up with on our own. “as the heavens tower over the earth, so God's love towers over the faithful.”

The storm that is our world today, seems to be raging ever more violently every day. Terrorist attacks, protests, confusion, hate and anger seem to be everywhere. And we have questions. Come to God with your questions, come to His Church, and He will give you answers.