

Idols and Hope in the Spiritual Wall

So Matthew's Gospel is actually kind of a dramatic scene. Caesarea, Philippi was about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, so Jesus took them on a little hike. And then at Caesarea, Philippi, there's this huge wall cliff that's about 100 feet high, 500 feet wide. Johnny put a little picture in the bulletin if you care to look at it. And on top of the cliff



was the city of Caesarea, Philippi. In this cliff, there were niches, and in these niches people would put their favorite god, because there were a lot of gods in that time.

And so Jesus takes these people there to this place of idol worship, and then says, "Who do you say that I am?" So Peter says, "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God." And then Jesus says, "You're Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." The rock, the big rock. Rock, rock, rock. And so, thank you, honey. And so he's going to be on top of that rock and leading what was called "The Way", in the early church, it was called The Way, The Way that's better than any of these that are in the niches. And so that dramatic scene to try to get across the importance of Christ, and Christ is above, beyond all of those that are in the niches.

And so then I thought, well, what's in my spiritual wall? What are the niches in my wall, your wall? What are they? Some of those idols, some of which are of God and some of which aren't. So what's in the niches of comfort, security, career, safety, family, friends, charity, justice? What's in your wall, the niches? Because some of it needs to come out, and let Peter show us the way to Christ.

But then I jumped at another notch, and I grew up. What's in the spiritual wall, the niches of our institutional church? What do we have in there? Various things that we spend our time on, like health, all of our hospitals, education for schools, charities that go to the ball, justice. And then the flip side, we've got patriarchy, we've got cover-ups, we've got clericalism, sex abuse. Those are some of the things in our niches in our institutional church, and it needs a savior. And hopefully Paul Leo is that rock now.

Or then I threw it into our country, and I was having a hard time finding some positive niches in this room. Maybe the one positive niche is we have freedom of religion, so we can pray, preach, share. But then we've got all this other stuff of war, power, vengeance, callousness towards children as they take away money from SNAP, callousness towards those on the margins of society because we took away US aid,

thousands, hundreds of thousands who had to die because of that, the ballroom, all these.

And when I think of those kind of things, all the negative idols, it gets a little overwhelming. And as I was preparing, I was deeply depressed. And then I saw one of my favorite pictures, that of Our Lady of Guadalupe. And Our Lady of Guadalupe came to people in dire straits when 90% of the Aztec nation was killed, and they were devastated. And then the strangers said, "Well, we're going to give you this Christian God." And the Aztecs were used to many gods, and the masculine gods were ones of war and power and strength. The female gods were gods of nurturing of the earth, of fertility, of beauty And so they lost all that feminine stuff when we said, "Here's Christianity," because we have a masculine Christianity and a patriarchal Christianity.

Until Our Lady of Guadalupe, that's when everything changed for the indigenous peoples, and they converted to millions, because they got the feminine touch. Our Lady of Guadalupe was a pregnant woman, was an indigenous woman. And so they felt a closeness to this Christ, because she was bringing Christ to them. And so I like to think of her when I get into these doldrums. It helped to clear up some of my idols.

I pray that we can all do that. Please take the lead of Christ today. Know that we do have some rock in Leo.

