

as Roman Catholic tradition has it. But he is surely more than a representative disciple, as so many Protestants have anxiously maintained. Rather, he is a man with a unique role in salvation history. His person marks a change in the times. His significance is akin to that of Abraham: his faith is the means by which God brings a new people into being. In fact, one should perhaps think of Gen 17. There too we witness the birth of the people of God through an individual whose name is changed to signify his crucial function (Abram becomes Abraham, 'father of a multitude'). Moreover, Abraham is, in Isa 51:1–2 (cf. the comments on 3:9), a rock from which the people of God are quarried. Is not Peter the patriarch of the church?

That the gates of Hades will not prevail against the church is not an allusion to Jesus' death and resurrection, nor to the general resurrection, nor to Christ's descent into hell (a thing otherwise unattested in this gospel). The most plausible interpretation is that the gates of Hades are the ungodly powers of the underworld who will assail the church in the latter days: the church will emerge triumphant from the eschatological assaults of evil. In the background is the end-time scenario of powers which, unleashed from below, rage against the saints (cf. 1 *Enoch* 56:8; Rev 11:7; 17:8). One may compare Rev 9:1–11, where the demonic hosts, under their king, Abaddon, come up from the bottomless pit to torment humanity. They prevail against all except those with the seal of God.

In v. 19 Peter is given the keys to the kingdom, which is explicated to mean that he has the authority to bind and loose (cf. 18:18). This is not a statement about exorcism or the forgiveness of sins (cf. Jn 20:23). Rather, Peter, as a sort of supreme rabbi of the kingdom, is given teaching authority. His decisions stand.

**(16:21–3)** Once it is evident that Israel as a corporate body is not going to welcome Jesus as the Messiah, two things remain to be done. First, Jesus must found a new community. Secondly, he must give his life as a ransom for many. Having just begun the first task in the previous paragraph, he now turns his eyes towards the second. His prophetic foresight is such that he can see the future, including his own death. But Peter, who here goes from the heights to the depths and functions not as the rock on which the church is built but as a stone of stumbling (Isa 8:14), behaves like a fool and does not recognize the necessity of messianic

suffering. Jesus rebukes him in the strongest possible terms—and shows that the Messiah goes to his death as a free man: he chooses his own destiny.

**(16:24–8)** After the brief narrative setting (v. 24a) there are sayings on discipleship (vv. 24b–26) and the eschatological future, which will come sooner rather than later (vv. 27–8). The logic is clear: thought of the future should encourage acts of discipleship in the present, for only the final state matters (cf. v. 26). But discipleship is not easy of achievement. Jesus is not a substitute but a leader who must be followed (v. 24; cf. 4:18–22; 8:18–22; 9:9), and his life ends in suffering and crucifixion (vv. 21–3). Further, Jesus calls for a surrender or denial of self no matter what the cost or dangers (v. 25). This means above all obedience to another's will (cf. Gethsemane). Anything more difficult could hardly be asked of human beings. Faith is obedience, and obedience is the grave of the will.

**(17:1–8)** The major theme of this epiphany is Jesus' status as a new Moses. 'Six days later' (v. 1, an ambiguous reference, but cf. Ex 24:16) Jesus' face shines like the sun (v. 2) as does Moses' face in Ex 34:29–35 (cf. Philo, *vit. Mos.* 170; *Ps.-Philo*, LAB 12:1). As in Ex 24:15–18; 34:5 a bright cloud appears, and a voice speaks from it (so too Ex 24:16). The onlookers—a special group of three (v. 1; cf. Ex 24:1)—are afraid (v. 6; cf. Ex 34:29–30). And all this takes place on a mountain (v. 1; cf. Ex 24:12, 15–18; 34:3). Moreover, Moses and Elijah, who converse with the transfigured Jesus, are the only figures in the OT who speak with God on Mount Sinai, so their presence together makes us think of that mountain. Jesus is the prophet like Moses of Deut 18:15, 18.

The transfiguration relates itself to the immediately preceding narrative. It illustrates 16:24–8 first by showing forth the glory of the parousia foretold in vv. 27–9 (cf. 2 Pet 1:16–18) and secondly by making concrete the resurrection hope of those who follow the hard commands of Jesus issued in vv. 24–6. (In 13:43 the resurrected saints shine like the sun.) As for the prophecy of passion and resurrection in 16:21–3, the transfiguration anticipates Jesus' exaltation. Further, through the allusion of the voice to Isa 42:1 ('with him I am well pleased') Jesus is made out to be the suffering servant of Isaiah. Going back even further, to 16:13–20, the divine confession of Jesus as the Son of God confirms and underlines Peter's confession.