Today is Founders Day. 159 years ago, today, those three young Sisters arrived in Chicago. I trust that they and all the Benedictine Sisters of Chicago who have preceded us into the kingdom of glory, are interceding for us these days. That’s every one of them, from Sister Adalberta Glatt to Sister Joan Gannon.

Within the first 50 years of our community’s history, we remember that there were times when the common prayer took varied forms, because there wasn’t always the privilege of the Divine Office. So doubtless the Bible was cherished. Whether in German or English, the Old and New Testaments were turned to for insights and for private prayer. And likely there wasn’t a library shelf full of commentaries! I wonder what those early members of our community thought about when they came across Matthew chapter 16: verses 13-20. The issues of their times were so different. It is all part of both history and mystery that our God/who is beyond all names is also beyond all ages/, and grace and inspiration were every bit as rich and sanctifying then as they are now.

Doesn’t inspiration mean that the Bible carries from the Spirit some message for each reader? There is so much in the Scripture texts given to us for today that I had to struggle about what of my reflections I wanted to share, or which could I figure out how to share.

What I came up with are some questions.

Why was Peter chosen, and what does that mean for us?

And what authority was being given to him and his successors? And what does that mean for us?

In this gospel passage, Jesus has arrived in Caesarea Philippi with his disciples, just them alone. Recent events have included the miraculous feeding of the crowds, exchanges with Pharisees and Sadducees, and warnings to his close friends here of the danger these apparent religious authorities could be to them. So now this notion of where true religious authority really rests, is brought up directly. Jesus asks what people say about him and then what THEY say. It’s Peter who speaks up and declares that HE is God’s Son. At that, Jesus acknowledges that it could only be from his heavenly Father that Peter could have learned that truth.

Whatever gifts Peter had, perfection was not one. He was an ordinary fisherman, the first to be invited to come along with Jesus as he started his public life. Peter was certainly not someone who never faltered or doubted or made mistakes. Both before and after this time when he’s given leadership for God’s people, he made mistakes, blundered, and even lied. Like us, he too was still loved and forgiven. Jesus knew that even in his weakness he could handle the task.

So what does that mean for us?

We’ve all been called as were our Benedictine foremothers. No one of us can say we have not been chosen. Every one of us has been given the responsibility to use whatever it is we find we are
good at, and to use that well. Be it planning or organizing, musical talent or baking, teaching or counseling, listening or affirming, being playful or serious, we are to acknowledge what we are good at and do THAT well. Our personal flaws or lack of certain skills or talents, or our weakness sometimes in face of stress, the uneasiness of these days of pandemic and disturbing racism, nothing must ever blind us or deafen us to the call to love. We are over and over, as individuals and as community, being called to serve with reverence where there is need.

Now to that second question: what authority was being given to Peter and his successors? And what does that mean for us?

Whatever you bind on earth “shall be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.” That is how our lectionary’s translation reads.

These lines, this thought, has always been tough for me. It somehow sounds as if what “leadership on earth” determines to be right, will then become right in eternity. How can that be? When praying the Our Father I don’t hear that. In the Lord’s prayer, which is daily for all of us, we say: “thy will be done on earth as it IS in heaven.”

The Anchor Bible Commentary presented an insight that was most helpful for me. Certainly, I am not a linguist; I can read no Hebrew, no Greek, no Aramaic, and precious little Latin.

But I was heartened to read in this commentary that the Latin Vulgate translates these lines in a way that corresponds to Greek meanings. When that is done, something different is conveyed. Here’s how that translation reads:

Whatever you bind on earth “will have been bound” in heaven. Do you hear the difference? Not will be bound, but will have been bound in heaven.

Whatever you loose on earth, “will have been loosed in heaven.”

The thought is that the Church on earth is to be carrying out heaven’s decisions communicated by the Spirit, not heaven ratifying the Church’s decision. And in heaven, eternity, all is LOVE. So, the Pontiff --- attentive always to the Spirit--- is to be providing guidance so as to support and nurture the people of God, the Church, to be that Love, incarnate. To be the Body of Christ.

What does that say to us today? It calls us to be faith-filled, to open our hearts so as to be led by the Church’s guidance and to support one another in our human efforts to live “as it is in heaven.” We are flawed, imperfect, blundering, true, but loved and forgiven, over and over. We are, just like Peter, all of us.

In these times, as in all times, we gather regularly just as our Founders did, to be fed by the Word in scripture and the Bread of Eucharist.

Today, Founders Day, and, yes, every day, we have so much to celebrate. Thanks be to God.