

Homily Notes for Sunday, August 23, 2020, 21st in Ordinary Time A

Peter is given the keys to the Kingdom and the Catholic Church has the keys to the faith.

Readings: Isa 22:19-23, Ps 138, Romans 11:33-36, Matthew 16:13-20

- 1. Summary:** Today's we have two basic Catholic identity issues. The first is the role of Peter as the first Pope upon whom the church is founded. The second is the authority of the "keys". This has to do with us being a unified church with an authoritative magisterium that guides the entire Church. Let's look at this more deeply.
- 2. The first reading:** This gives a description of the *investiture of a royal court official*. The robe, the sash, and the keys are insignia of this office. Isaiah tells of how the keys of authority were taken away from Shebna, the unfaithful and proud "master of the royal palace," and given to the humble and faithful Eliakim. This handing over of the "keys", which open and shut, represents the authority of Christ, which has been delegated to Peter and the Apostles and their successors, both in the forgiveness of sins but also in ruling the Church.
- 3. Today's psalm,** David thanks God for having given him *authority* as king over the people of Israel.
- 4. The second reading:** St. Paul points out that God is the *source of all authority* on earth and in heaven.
- 5. Today's gospel passage:** Jesus directly asks the disciples who they believe that he is. Peter provides the answer of faith, affirming, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus then gives the power of the keys in Mt. 16:16-20 which defines Catholicism. "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church..."

The context for this question: Caesarea Philippi was a very cosmopolitan area outside of Jewish territory. At this gushing spring, which is the very source of the Jordan River, William Barclay relates that there were at least 14 temples to the ancient Syrian Baal worship. In the same area was a cavern dedicated to the Greek god Pan, the god of nature and of military victory. There exists to this very day the ruins of a temple to the Greek God, Moneta. Moneta was represented on Confederate currency! In Caesarea Philippi there was a great temple built to the godhead of Caesar. All the Roman emperors were declared to be "gods". Worship and reverence was demanded of them. This area was also precious to Jews for it was the source of the river Jordan. It was here that Jesus deliberately set himself against the background of the world's religions in all their history and their splendor, and demanded to be compared with them and to have the verdict given in his favor.

Basic Understandings:

- 6. What is the Church?** The Church of Jesus Christ is the congregation of all baptized persons united in the same true faith in Jesus Christ, the same sacrifice, and the same sacraments, under the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff and the bishops in communion with him.
- 7. Who belongs to the Church?** All the baptized are members of the Church. When we are baptized, we become part of the Church which is the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-13, 27-31). Hence, every baptized Christian pertains to the Church. There are five different passages in the New Testament which describe the Church as the Body of Christ. We, Catholics, understand all other validly baptized Christians to pertain to the Church imperfectly or incompletely (CCC 838).
- 8. What is the rock? The best interpretation of this is that Peter himself and his faith is the rock on which the Church is founded.** Some might say that God, of Jesus, is the rock on which the Church is founded. Indeed, frequently in the Old Testament God is referred to as our Rock. But in the New Testament God, himself, is better seen as the builder or the architect of the Church. Jesus Christ is its cornerstone and the Apostles and prophets as seen as levels of its foundation.
- 9. God as architect and maker of the Church.** When describing the faith of Jacob, St Paul says, "By faith Abraham obeyed, for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose **architect and maker** is God.
- 10. Jesus and the Apostles (and prophets) as foundation.** In Ephesians 2:20 the prophets and the apostles are said to be the foundation of the Church. It is on their work and on their witness and fidelity that the Church on earth, humanly speaking, depends. In the same passage Jesus Christ is the chief *corner-stone*. (Also Rev 21:14).

11 Reason for the Pope (Holy Father): Here, Jesus reveals his plan to build his Church on the foundation of Peter, whom he gave the keys of teaching and governing authority in the Church. Thus, Peter receives a new mission symbolized by a change of name, Cephas becoming Peter, the rock (*petros*), on which Jesus will build his church which the power of evil cannot overcome. Peter will receive the keys of the kingdom and be given the power to bind and to loose on earth that which will be ratified in heaven. Note that this is not limited to the power to forgive sins but to defining and ratifying all truth in the Church. This means that the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, is the successor of Peter. Let us note that the Bible says that it is the Church, not the Bible that is the pillar and foundation of truth.

“But if I should be delayed, you should know how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living god, the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Tim 3:15)”

This is all made clear in our first reading in which Eliakim receives the symbols of authority and power of the first “steward” of the kingdom.

“On that day... I will clothe him with your robe, and gird him with your sash, and give over to him your authority. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place the key of the House of David on his shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open.”

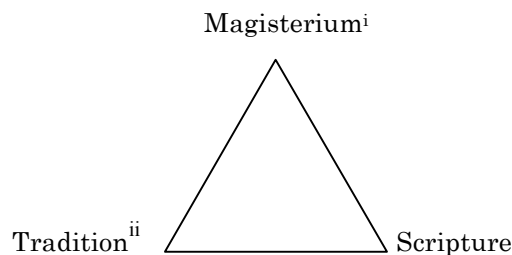
This parallel is reinforced at the first resurrection appearance to the Apostles, John 20:21-23:

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you...” “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

12. The solemn Magisterium of the Church: in the First Vatican Council, defined the doctrine of the primacy of Peter and his successors in these terms:

“We teach and declare, therefore, according to the testimony of the Gospel that the primacy of jurisdiction over the whole Church was immediately and directly promised to, and conferred upon the blessed Apostle Peter.. After Simon had acknowledged Christ with the confession, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (Mt 16:16), it was to Simon alone that the solemn words were spoken by the Lord: ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven’ (Mt 16:17-19). And after his Resurrection, Jesus conferred upon Simon Peter alone the jurisdiction of supreme shepherd and ruler over his whole fold with the words, ‘Feed my lambs... Feed my sheep’ (Jn 21:15-17).

13. Apologetic: Applications Concerning the Papacy: On the basis of his profession of faith (the first recorded) in Jesus, Jesus then commissions Peter as the rock upon which he will build his Church, with the authority recognized in the keys of the Kingdom and with the power to bind and loose which is supernatural. This is why the Papal Office is known as the Petrine Office.



14. Peter’s power to bind and to loose, concerns not only sins but also doctrine. To have the fullness of truth one must have Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium. See 2 Thess 2:15 concerning the role of oral and written tradition and 1 Tim 3:15 on authority of the Church (magisterial function). Neither Protestantism nor Islam has this office. Without an authoritative office in the Church one would just enter into the confusion of some 20,000 Protestant denominations. In Islam each Imam has a certain independence for interpreting the Koran, the Sunnah, and the Hadiths. No other Church or religion has this office.

15. The good news of this message is that we can see clearly that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that we can be proud of being Catholic, for our understanding of the Church, its structure, its authority, its beliefs are all biblically and spiritually correct.

Extra resources:

What is “religion” and why is it necessary? The English word, “religion” derives from the Latin, “religio” which means “to bind back.” Mankind was once in union with God which the Original Sin broke. “Religion” deals with the behaviors and practices which help us to reconnect with God and be in a right relationship with him (such as faith and baptism). We use the same idea in “ligament”. Anyone who would claim to “have Jesus” but not want “religion” would be in the position of having an intellectual idea and no way to realize it or carry it out. Hence, for the Christian, “religion” is a set of beliefs and practices followed by those committed to the service and worship of God (Like the Ten commandments). Those who do not have these religious practices do not pertain to that god or set of beliefs.

Infallibility. We should also note that the 1st Vatican Council very closely limited the understanding of when the Pope speaks “infallibly – ex cathedra (from the chair). He is to be respected and honored but normally exercises his authority in conjunction with the Bishops of the world.

Apologetic: Concerning Reconciliation: This is one of three passages in the New Testament where Jesus specifically delegates the power to forgive sins, either to Peter himself or to the Apostles (See also Mt 18:18 and John 20:22-23). The Apostles then delegate this power to their successors, the Bishops, who later delegated it to their assistants, the priests. Note that since this power was never delegated to the deacons, they cannot administer the Sacrament of Anointing (Last Rites) because it involves the forgiveness of sins.

In the Catechism: Concerning having Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior see CCC 299 and 2558. While expressed explicitly only twice in the Catechism, Catholic Spirituality, such as the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, as well as the promises present in all the Sacraments, illustrates how important developing that personal relationship and commitment to Jesus is to us Catholics. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is one of the best ways to develop that relationship.

Accepting the Authority of the Church. Especially important in things we do not understand. Love, money sexuality, relations. Special note about how the Church determines truth.

Response of Faith: Life messages: 1) Accepting Jesus as our Lord and personal Savior is important because of who Jesus is. This becomes possible by listening to him through daily, meditative reading of the Bible, by talking to him through daily, personal and communal prayers. He is our beloved friend, closer to us than our dear ones, and a living experience who walks with us, loves us, forgives us, helps us and transforms our lives and outlook. We have to give all areas of our lives to him. He must direct our daily lives, and we must radiate to all around us his sacrificial *agape* love, overflowing mercy and committed service. With Peter we must say, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (Jn 6:68).

What can I take from this Mass to become the better-version-of-myself that the Lord wants?

Are you prepared to defend and explain your Catholic faith? How can we help you in this?

Are you prepared to receive all the benefits of the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

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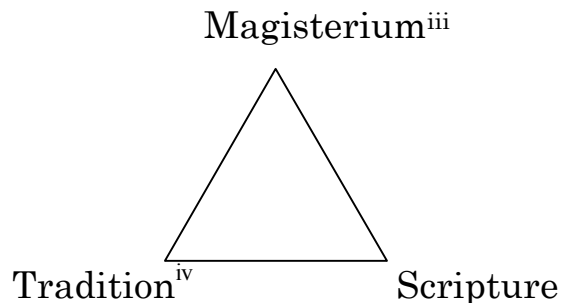
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