

Homily For the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year A

St. Peter's Sunday 10/12/5 Masses August 23, 2020

Isaiah 22:15,19-23 "I will place on him the key of the house of David. He shall open and no one shut."

Psalms 138: "Though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly. Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever."

Rom 11:33-36 "How inscrutable are his ways. From him and through him and to him are all things. "

Matt 16:13-20 "Who do you say that I am? I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

Who Has the Key?

Introduction

One thing we have during this time is a whole new category of things to make jokes about. So this fellow, during the height of the lockdown, says: I went outside for a brief moment, the door closed and locked behind me and I didn't have my house keys with me. So I called a locksmith for help. When the locksmith arrived, I asked: Are you sure you should be out during this lockdown? He replied: It's okay, I'm a key worker.

Our son put one of those locks on his back door that is a push button code entry so he wouldn't always have to have his keys with him when he went out. Sure enough, though, two weeks after the original installation, the battery that powers the lock died and he was locked out.

These keys in my hand are old style keys, used as a prop in a play about pirates. They are keys intended to open a treasure chest. Regardless of the locking system, there is still a key to gaining access to our homes and treasures.

At this very moment, you and I are being asked to consider keys to understanding our scriptures, our Church, who is Jesus Christ, and what we are even doing here, whether physically or virtually.

Keys and Binding

Jesus says to Peter: You are a rock, not a rock star, but a rock on top of which I am going to build a Church so invincible that, even when it looks like it is about to be

toppled or crushed, that the forces of hell will not be able to defeat. I will give you keys to the kingdom of heaven. You will have authority, my own divine authority, the power to bind and loose, to decide what is true and what is not.

Shebna's Folly

Before we get to what it means that Jesus gave Peter the keys to the kingdom, we have a passage from Isaiah, 600 years before Jesus, from which Jesus draws key images.

In Canada, we have a Prime Minister, who is the highest authority in the land. In that time, the king was king, but he had a Prime Minister who basically ran the day to day operations. Shebna was that man for King Hezekiah. He was number two in authority through all the land. And, when the king was busy, he had the king's own authority. He oversaw even the cabinet of the various other ministers of departments. He was in charge of everything: horses, armies, everything.

Now Hezekiah was a good king, devoted to God and his people. But, somehow, he appointed a not very good person to be his Prime Minister. Shebna felt pretty secure. He was even having built a beautiful tomb so that he would be remembered even after his death.

I guess King Hezekiah wasn't all that good of a judge of character. But God definitely is a perfect judge of character, so God sent the prophet Isaiah to Shebna to tell him: You may be enjoying your authority, but you are about to be history. I am the true king of Judah and I am about to throw you out on your behind, out of your exalted position. Not only that but I will install someone in your place who is currently very low in authority and very humble, into your position. We can imagine why Shebna laughed at this prophecy. That didn't stop him from being replaced by the humble man of God, Eliakim, in due time.

Matthew

What does this have to do with Jesus and Peter? People think all kinds of things about Jesus today. Some very recent research from our part of the world says that nine out of ten believe Jesus Christ was a real person who actually lived. We have

much historical evidence to support this. At least half of all adults also believe that Jesus is God and that he was sinless during his life on earth. So, we know that, just as in Jesus' own earthly time, the world is divided about him.

Jesus shows himself already to be the ultimate good king. Despite the true greatness of many in history, no one has ever given himself up for the entire human race. This is a matter of faith, but it is also evident in every page and by every writer of Sacred Scripture. The evidence is historical. It is consistent. It is compelling and convincing for anyone willing to see it.

Watch what Jesus does. He took his disciples 30 km north, to the pagan city of Caesaria Philippi, right into the heart of a city named by Philip, the son of Herod, a cruel king; A city named after a Caesar, who was thought of as a divine son, a god. A major temple was there, to the god Pan, which essentially means the god of everything.

Was Jesus worried or insecure about his identity and what people thought of him, as some people think? Hardly. Jesus knew exactly who he was and what he was doing. You can see today, the massive rock formation, a cliff, where Jesus stood facing his disciples. Imagine them looking at him, and staring behind him at this great rock formation as he asks them the question: Who do people say that I am? They answer with the ideas from the world: Well, you do all the things the great prophets of old did, miracles and proclaiming God, so you are obviously in the prophetic line.

Were those worldly ideas correct? Elijah? Wrong. Jeremiah or one of the prophets? Wrong. John the Baptist? Wrong. Just like many of the ideas about Jesus today, they were wrong, wrong, wrong.

Then Jesus put them on the spot. If you have ever been to that rock at Caesarea Philippi, you can never forget how you felt, imagining Jesus looking right at you and asking: What about you? What do you say? Who do you think I am? I don't know about you, but I would be exactly hoping Peter would speak up. He usually did. Better that he looks bad getting it wrong, than me being embarrassed.

Peter did not disappoint: You are the Christ, the anointed one, the Son of the living God, not the god they worship in this city.

You nailed it, Peter, Jesus declares. But, you didn't figure it out by yourself. That insight is from God alone. Only by turning to God for insight does anyone get it right. Depend on your own wisdom or the wisdom of the world or the wisdom of the internet and you WILL always get it wrong, wrong, wrong.

The Church

In Shebna's time, who was it who had the ultimate authority to replace a bad leader with a good one? It was God. In Jesus' time, who was it who had the authority to establish a Church and to appoint a Prime Minister to run that Church. It was Jesus. That is why we recognize the power of God in Jesus, and the power of the master of the household, the Prime Minister, in the Pope. What does pope mean? It means 'papa' or father.

Have there been bad popes and bishops, the successors to the Apostles? Yes, some really bad ones, for sure, even today. That matters, but that's not the point today. The point is that the authority of the king is still present in the Pope and the bishops, who are the successors to the Apostles. Jesus did not leave us without his own presence, in the power of the Holy Spirit, but also in the Church.

We have had a whole century of amazing and holy popes. But even when that doesn't happen, God is still in charge and turning things around. The fact that there has been corruption and abuse in the Church is a very terrible thing. Because of it, many have lost their faith. But God, the great king and father of all will continue to tear down those unfaithful leaders and, like he did with Shebna, He will eventually throw them out of office and replace them with holy and humble fathers of his people. It is the way it has always been and will always be until the kingdom of heaven reigns supreme.

Call To Action

The god Pan was not real and the superheroes we worship are not real. But, Jesus is real. Jesus is the friend of sinners who turn back to him and say: My Lord and my God. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Grant me your love and mercy. Many are 'unfriending' him, like what people do on Facebook, at a time when their lives are being shaped toward the future.

We do no better today than to let Jesus' question resound in our hearts every day of our life: Who do you say I am? In our answer, will we base our life on the rock of God's faithfulness. Will you turn to the Church Jesus founded for key to the meaning of your life? I hope so. Will you pray with me today that we unite ourselves to the rock of the Church and the king who gave himself so that we not be outside without our keys, but on that rock which even the gates of hell will not prevail against. That is Jesus. This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. I pray that we would be proud to profess it in Jesus Christ our Lord and king.

Key Verses Today

Isaiah: *Thus says the Lord God of hosts: Say to the steward, Shebna, master of the household: I will thrust you from your office and I will call my servant Eliakim and will clothe him with your robe. I will commit your authority to his hand, and he shall be a father to the house of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open and no one shall shut. He shall shut and no one shall open.*

Psalms: *Though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly. Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.*

Romans: *How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return? For from him and through him and to him are all things.*

Matthew: *In the district of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples: Who do people say that the Son of Man is? And they said: Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the Prophets. He said to them: But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered him: Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*