

Why do we have a Pope?

A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to talk with a friend about the Pope. He was a protestant and so he did not agree with the Catholic Church's teaching on the Pope. Eventually, he had reached a degree of openness by the grace of God and I was able to explain the Church's teaching about the biblical roots of the papacy. Even though we BELIEVE in the Pope, some of us may not know WHY we believe in the Pope. He is like that old man at our family party that we all love but are not sure how he is related to us. So the question my friend had for me was, ***"Why do you believe in the Pope?"***

So as I was sitting with my friend in the coffee shop, I pulled up Mt 16:13-19 on my phone and in my mind I knew that this passage centered around two key images: the rock and the keys.

THE ROCK

I began reading the passage "When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Phillipi..."

I asked my friend, "Why do you think Jesus went to Caesarea Phillipi?"

He said, "I don't know. Why did Jesus go there?"

"In Caesarea Phillipi, there was actually a temple that was built in honor of Caesar Augustus, and this temple was built upon the pinnacle of a rock wall overlooking Caesarea Phillipi. Think about it. When Jesus says, 'You are Peter and on this ROCK I will build my Church', he is contrasting the temple of Caesar Augustus built upon the physical ROCK in Caesarea Phillipi with the Church of Jesus Christ built upon Peter, the new ROCK. Peter's name in Greek means 'rock'"

"Wow. I never thought about it that way" my friend said.

I replied, "Yea that is pretty amazing isn't it? Let's keep reading. 'I will give you the KEYS of the kingdom...' What keys do you think Jesus is referring to?"

My friend had a puzzled look on his face and said, "What is he referring to?"

"If we turn to Isa 22:15-22, we will see that there is a reference to the KEYS. Here is some context. In this chapter, God is speaking about Shebna. Who is Shebna? Shebna was the steward of the kingdom of David, the prime minister of the

kingdom. Think about the British kingdom. The British kingdom has a king or queen and in this case, it is Queen Elizabeth. This queen has someone to represent her in Canada called a prime minister as we all know. In the same way, the Kingdom of Israel had King David and his successors, but the kingdom also had a prime minister, a steward of the kingdom.

In this case, it was Shebna. Isa 22:15-22 is talking about how God is removing Shebna from his office for his sin against God and God was passing on this responsibility to another successor, Eliakim. If we look at Isa 22:22, notice what is the sign of authority that is being passed on:

'In that day, I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah...He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the house of Judah. And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open.' (Isa 22:20-22).'

The keys were a symbol of authority which the King had, but this could be delegated to the prime minister through the bestowal of the keys. So there are three components: Kingdom, King and Prime Minister. Israelite Kingdom, King David or one of his successors, and Shebna/Eliakim.

So if Jesus is restoring the kingdom, what kingdom is he referring to?"

"The Kingdom of heaven."

"Correct! And who is the King?"

"Jesus"

"Right! And who is the prime minister or the steward of the kingdom of heaven?"

"Peter...and his successors?"

"Exactly! This is the biblical foundation for our belief in the papacy as directly instituted by Jesus Christ himself, the new King of the Kingdom who is establishing Peter as the Steward of his Kingdom. This is what we believe as Catholics."

Today as we celebrate the feast of the Chair of St. Peter, let us give thanks to God for the gift of the papacy and pray for our Pope that he may remain steadfast in the identity given to him by Christ: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.