

What is the Catholic interpretation of 'bind and loose'?

What is the Catholic interpretation of "to bind and loose" found in Matthew 16:19?

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Let's turn to Matthew 16:19, where Our Lord says to Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Part of giving Peter the "keys" involved the authority to "bind and loose." As we see a couple chapters later in Matthew, this was an authority shared with the other apostles (Mt. 18:18).

This "binding and loosing" authority may sound strange to us, but this language had several familiar meanings in Jesus' time, including:

- (a) the ability to make "binding" decisions or binding interpretations of the law;
- (b) the authority to include or exclude members in a given community; and
- (c) the forgiveness of sins ("loosing" in the sense of releasing or freeing from sins) (see Rev. 1:5; see generally Catechism, nos. 553, 881).

All these meanings come into play with Peter as Christ's prime minister or vicar who has been entrusted with the keys of the kingdom and made head of the apostles and pastor of the universal Church.

The authority to "bind and loose" was confirmed and fulfilled on Easter Sunday, when Our risen Lord appeared to His disciples and breathed on them, saying: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn. 20:22-23).

Our consideration of the "binding and loosing" authority entrusted to Peter and the other apostles should give all the faithful a greater appreciation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Consideration of "binding and loosing" can't be separated from the issue of papal succession. After all, it's one thing to concede that certain authority was given to Peter; it's quite another thing to say that this authority has been passed in an unbroken succession up to Pope Benedict XVI.

The foregoing is taken from Leon Suprenant's post entitled "What Have You Got to 'Loose'?" appearing at the [Catholic Hour blog](#). That post was part of a series of posts that week on Matthew 16. Check out [other posts in that series](#):

- Peter's Confession of Faith
- You Are Peter
- Like a Rock
- Keys to the Kingdom
- Church Authority Doesn't "Peter" Out