

Homily Notes for Sunday, August 28, 2017, 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: Half way through Matthew, we have seen the power of Jesus in healings, in his parables, in his feeding of the five thousand and of the four thousand. Now we turn to the very identity of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, and the establishment of His Church in the power of the keys.

Today we have two issues. First is the identity of Jesus and then the importance of His Church and “religion”. If he is who he claims, what would that mean about his authority and why we would obey him?

Second, Catholics, who have historically seen in this passage the establishing of the Church, need to appreciate what the Church is and why participation in it is essential for all Christians. This also involves the definition of “religion.” Historically “religion” is that which allows us to be “connected once again” with God.

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, especially in Reconciliation.

3. Today’s psalm, David thanks God for having raised him from lowly origins and 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 “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). 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.

9. Why do people react to the Church and to Religion? Partly because they do not agree with the truth. But also because they May see hypocrisy and imperfection in those who claim these things. Integrity and humility!

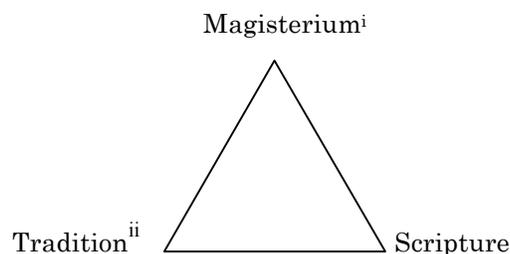
10. Reason for the Pope (Holy Father): Here, Jesus reveals his plan to build his Church on the foundation of Peter, whom he gave the keys of teaching and governing authority in the Church. Thus, Peter receives a new mission symbolized by a change of name, Cephas becoming Peter, the rock (*petros*), on 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 Peter 3:15)”

11. 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).

12. 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.



13. 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.

14. 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.

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.
