

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time A - We are all Called to be Living Stones of the Church

August 23, 2020.

Would you give your house keys to just anyone? How about car keys? Your PINs and passwords? Keys, PINs and passwords are the doorways to our most intimate and private things, our treasures. Our loved ones are kept safe at night by locked doors. Their privacy is cherished and respected as well. Handing someone your keys implies trust, and it indicates that the recipient knows you and respects you.

The first reading (Isaiah 22:19-23) shows the contrast between the faithful steward entrusted with the keys to everything and the steward stripped of them due to his infidelity. The palace to which Isaiah refers to is the royal palace, an important responsibility. The master of the palace, a steward, acts in the king's name and represents the king's interests in many ways. When Isaiah refers to the house of Judah and the House of David he is referring to the royal family and the kingdom. A good steward to the king serves him, his family, his servants, and his people. It requires a solid acknowledgment of who is truly in charge: the king. We don't know what Shebna did to get fired, but Isaiah sees in Eliakim, a man who will stand firm in his service to all. **This reading is a Scriptural foundation for the Church's faith on what it meant to have Christ, Our King, entrust the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, his keys, to Peter and his successors.**

In the second reading (Romans 11:33-36), St. Paul reminds us that an even greater treasure and responsibility has been entrusted to Peter and his successors. God came in person in his son to reveal the treasures of Our Father: **"the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God."** The Church has faithfully watched over this treasure through the centuries, but not just collectively. Our Lord entrusted Peter and his successors with what we call today the *deposito fidei*: **the deposit of faith.** Our treasure is the truth about God, about who Our Lord is and what he said and did, about the path to holiness and happiness. **The greatest treasure the Church watches over and communicates is the truth about who Jesus is.**

In the Gospel reading (Matthew 16:13-20), our Lord starts quizzing his disciples about the rumours regarding him but then hits them with a pop quiz. Who did people think Our Lord was? Simply a prophet, and, for most, not even a new prophet: one back from the dead! Little did the disciples realize as they rattled off the theories that they'd have to answer for themselves too. Peter taught us how we should respond: **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** Jesus' question confronts us daily as well and calls us to judge ourselves as to how we are living our lives, working at our marriage, rearing our children, relating to our neighbours. What is the point of saying the Lord is our light and our strength if we do not live accordingly? We need the grace of God to help us. Peter's profession of faith in the Gospel was bolstered by grace, not just his own sleuthing. **The Father revealed something about his Son in Peter's response, and Peter's faith should be our faith.** Peter's faith in Christ was rewarded by Christ's trust in him. Christ entrusted Peter because he knew that Peter knew and respected him. Just as Eliakim was entrusted with the keys to all the House of David's possessions, Peter was entrusted with the keys to the kingdom of Heaven. Christ tells Peter that the rock on which he will found his church is exactly, Peter. The gates of hell will not prevail against him or against the church which is built on this rock.

The problem is that so often it looks as if the gates of hell have prevailed against Christ's church and it actually begins with Peter. The apostle who is the rock of the Church betrayed the Lord when he is most needed. A betrayal like that seems to have something hellish about it, doesn't it? In fact, wasn't Peter's betrayal of Christ just like the betrayal by Judas? But the Gospels say that Satan entered into Judas before he betrayed Christ (John 13:27). There is something hellish about the betrayal by Judas then. What about Peter's? There is a difference between Judas and Peter. It is not that Peter repented and Judas didn't. The Gospels say that Judas repented, too (Matthew 27:3). However, when Judas saw the sin of his betrayal for what it was, he killed himself thinking he was irredeemable. He focused on his own fault rather than on Christ's mercy. Peter came back to Christ. He cleaved to the Lord he loved even in the face of his own brokenness. He trusted in the love of Jesus to forgive him. After all it was Jesus who told him one should forgive not seven but seventy times seven times, right? And that is why Peter is the rock on which the Church is founded. The Church is not a collection of the sinless, but sinners who repent. The Church was founded on Peter, who loved, and sinned, and held on to the Lord anyway. The gates of Hell cannot prevail against this kind of love. This is a deeply comforting thought.

We are all called to be Living Stones of the Church. St. Peter encouraged believers under fire to ***"Come to him [Jesus] that living stone, rejected by men but in God's mind chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house"*** (1 Peter 2:5). Jesus gave Peter a special mission: ***"you are the rock on which I will build my Church"***: Peter was a living stone who put out the nets for a catch after a long fishless night. He was the first one to tell Christ he didn't know what he was getting into by inviting him to follow him. Yet he did and became the rock on which Christ built his Church. **We are all called to be living stones who build upon the bedrock of the Church, to form that spiritual edifice, to build up the Church. The Holy Spirit is the protagonist; we are the instruments, he will transform us into living stones if we let him. Let's ask the Holy Spirit this week to show us how we too can edify the Church.**