



In the scriptures this Sunday, the Lord talks to us about the power and authority which he invests in his people. It is a power and authority to be used not for self gain or self advancement, but for the good of the community.

He shows us this through the language of "*the keys*" and those who hold *the keys*. In the Isaiah reading, we see God's judgement descending upon the house of Jerusalem, in **taking** the keys from Shebna the key-keeper who has been unfaithful, and **giving** the keys to Eliakim, a true servant of David.

Peter in the Gospel is *given the keys* of the kingdom of heaven, because he professes publicly his faith in the Messiahship of Jesus. But neither Peter nor anyone else was given every talent or gift: each piece of God's authority is spread

among the people of God; each one is called to use *whatever they have* for the building up of the kingdom, no matter the hardships or circumstances. The Psalm Response this Sunday offers us the opportunity to place ourselves in the very love of God, praising him that his love is eternal, asking him not to discard us, the work of his hands.

Since ancient times, keys have been a symbol of responsibility and authority; the keeper of the keys has the power to let others come and go. Our own keys control who may enter our homes or businesses or who may use our cars.

In Peter being given the keys, he is invested with the Lord's authority: whatever Peter binds on earth will be considered bound in heaven; whatever he looses on earth, the same holds in heaven. The Church's faith is that the same authority and trust given to Peter and shared with all the apostles still exists in the Church, in an unbroken line of apostolic succession in the persons of the bishops of the world in union with the Pope.

There is only one HEAD of the Church, of course, Christ himself, the KEYstone, but such is his love for his bride, the Church, that we, its members, all have a participation in the authority of Jesus: an authority of love, service and truth, in the world.

Animated by the Spirit, the Church continues to do Christ's work in the world, principally (but not exclusively) through the giving and receiving of the Sacraments, because through them Christ continues to sanctify and make whole our lives and our work. And so, as Jesus said to Peter, we can say to each other, confident that we speak the truth: We are children of God; we can help build Christ's Church, we can co-operate in the Spirit's work.

Caesarea Philippi is in northern Israel, and in the time of Jesus was a rather pagan area: it is here, in the land of the pagans, that he calls his disciples to account – *Who do people say I am...?* Having been with Jesus a long time, Peter has seen so much – the feeding of the five thousand, the walking on water, the healing of the sick.

Certainly Peter knows this Jesus is not ordinary, Is he a prophet? - yes, surely, but surely more!

Is he a teacher? - yes, but what a teacher! Jesus wants to know what they think, so Peter dares to confess:

you are the Anointed One, the Christ.

There in the midst of the pagans, Peter gives witness to his Master, as son of God. He gives Jesus a new title, the name spoken of before in the Old Testament as belonging to a long-awaited one, the Christ. In turn, Jesus gives Simon a new name: the name, Rock, Peter, strong one. Although Peter would waver, even betray his Master later, such is the trust put in him, that he would recover from his betrayal and be strong enough to lead the Church.

The situation in the homelands of Jesus now is much as it was in his own time: many divisions according to traditions and battles over to whom the lands belong. In our own country – the present situation notwithstanding - we live relatively securely, being keepers of our own keys, but today's scriptures teach us again that we belong to God, and that the real key we need is the key of heaven.

Peter confessed Jesus to be Christ amidst a pagan world: such is my role and yours; to consistently, gently perhaps, but courageously, confess Jesus as Lord and Christ. The key to heaven is the actions we perform which make Christ more clearly present in our homes, places of leisure, and businesses not through a judgmental catholicity, but by a witness of love and service which leads to the illumination of the truth in our lives.

The Beatitudes, which with we began our reading of Matthew's Gospel this year, the very charter of Christianity, are good humanism as well as good Christianity and good catholicity: and yet, when they are lived, it is without doubt the face of Jesus Christ made visible in ordinary human beings that they reveal and hold out to the world. In his own heart, despite his weakness, his regrets, his failures and his tears, Peter knew this. And Jesus knew it to. The same Jesus, looks into my heart and into yours, sees our potential for being holders of his keys; they are yours and mine, here in this place.