

The Paper Pulpit

(Reflections from the Pastor)

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it (Mt 16:18)... 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 loosen on earth shall be loosened in heaven."

In the Bible, a person is given a new name to signify a major development in his life. It could be a new responsibility, role or identity in the light of God's plan. Examples include the changing of the names of Abram, who became Abraham (Genesis 17:5), and Saul, who became Paul after his conversion (Acts 13:9). The most important name change in the Bible is that of Jesus himself. When people saw in him the Messiah, God's anointed one, they began calling him the Christ. For Peter, it was his appointment by Jesus as the rock on which the Lord would build his Church. Our Lord changes Simon's name when he says to him "*Simon, Son of Johan, I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church...*"

Jesus also gave Peter the "*keys to the kingdom of heaven*" and the authority that "*whatever you loosen on earth shall be loosened in heaven.*" Notice our Lord gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom of heaven (not earth). This authority follows the Jewish understanding of one having the power to declare something permissible or prohibited. It includes the power to impose or dispense one from an obligation in relation to his or her membership in the Church. Jesus' use of keys, which are symbols of authority in biblical literature, stresses Peter's mandate. The only way for Jesus to do this was to lead the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In John 21, Jesus appointed Peter as his vicar or deputy in the Church. From John 10 we read that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gathered his sheep into one flock, one fold: the Church. However, in obedience to the will of the Father, Jesus knew that he would be going back to Heaven, so he appointed someone to take his place ahead of the flock. In John 21:15-17, Jesus was just raised from the dead and preparing to return to the Father when he appeared to Peter and told him to "feed" and "tend" to his sheep. The Good Shepherd left his flock to the care of Peter. Later, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, to guide and preserve the church, its leaders and members.

The leadership of Peter among the Apostles and the early Christian Church is indisputable. The four gospels say Peter was the spokesperson of the Apostles, especially during climactic moments such as when he declared Jesus as the Messiah (Mt 16:16). Peter is almost always mentioned first when the Apostles are mentioned. At times, they are referred to only as "Peter and his companions," as in Luke 9:32.

Our Lord also tells Peter "*the gates of hell won't prevail against His Church.*" The devil has tried for nearly 2,000 years and is really doing so in recent years.

With the death of Peter, the Holy Spirit guided the Church in choosing a successor to take his place. When our Lord talked about "*binding and loosing*" he was saying what laws you make on earth will be backed up in heaven and whatever laws you change on earth will be backed up in heaven. Under the leadership and protection of the Holy Spirit, this succession continued unbroken through the centuries. The Church has an ancient list of popes starting from Peter up to John Paul II. Peter's immediate successor, Linus, is mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:21, and the name of Linus' successor, Clement, is found in Philippians 4. If you wonder how and why the Church can make and change some things, it comes directly from Jesus.

The term Pope, which came from the Latin "papa" and Greek "pappas" (father), was previously attached to the bishops or elders of the Church. It was later exclusively given to Peter's successors in recognition of their unique role. Popes are not perfect people, as Peter was not. But the Holy Spirit speaks through them; they hold the keys. Are you listening?

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Channel 19 – Eternal Word Television Network – 24 hour Catholic Television

93.9 FM – Relevant Radio – 24 hour Catholic Radio

RCIA: Are you (or someone you know):

- an unconfirmed adult in the Catholic Church and wish to be confirmed?
- from another Christian denomination interested in joining the Catholic Church?
- Catholic but not confirmed and are getting married in the Catholic Church?
- non-Catholic and married to a Catholic and have been attending Mass with them?
- not baptized and would like to be?

We would love to have you part of the Church and our parish community. Please contact Fr. Jim as soon as possible to learn more about joining the Catholic Church.

Sincerely in Christ, Fr. Jim Trempe