

Homily  
August 27, 2023  
21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
22:22 – 37:36

Keys! How many of you here have keys on your person or in your purse? Raise your hand.

Keys. (holds up key ring) They're the most amazing things. Made of metal. Handed on. Keys to the kingdom, the rectory, the church, the school and Bernadette Hall. And there are two others here that you don't need to know about. That's all I have to carry, are these. **Keys!**

But have you noticed that keys are giving way to other things. (Joe, I'm going to entrust you to make sure we don't lose those. – Boy, I hope he can handle that...) What about a key-fob? (holds up fob) You know the amazing thing is the key fob's got a key in it! That's for when the battery dies. Lock. Unlock. Hit the panic button. It's a wonderful thing.

Now we've gotten even fancier. (Where is it?) (Holding up an ID card) This is the key to the Catholic Center. This is how you get into the Catholic Center. And, this is how you get access to the printer to print what you sent it from your computer. It's a very interesting piece.

We also have "key boxes." You know, those things you put in numbers. Some of them are electronic.

We even have keys on the piano. Right, Doctor Martin? And they open the sound for us. Or the organ, they open the valve pipe. It opens so the air goes through and the pipe sounds. But they're controlled by the keys.

Why am I talking about keys? Because Isaiah the prophet and Matthew the Gospel writer mentioned "Keys" today. They are an important metaphor for us to consider.

We heard of Shebna, who is – as Isaiah says – going to be set aside as Master of the household. Earlier in that same chapter 22, it's very clear why the prophet is upset with him, and God is not happy, either.

Why? Because Shebna is full of himself. He has the keys to the House of Judah, to the king's very house. He is a lover of the finest of chariots. He loves wonderful food. And he has built a tomb to rival that of the king. He's all about himself. The people aren't that important to him.

And so the prophet says, "Shebna, you are going to be set aside." This is going to be taken away from you and given to Eliakim. And Eliakim is going to take the key and place it on his shoulder.

It's a strange place to put a key. Let's see (trying to put a key on his shoulder).

Keys in that time, in the ancient world, were very large. And the person who had the power of the key would hold it on his shoulder to show he had the authority to shut and to open.

**To shut and to open.** That means not only the house doors, but the power of the king. And that opening and shutting was for the benefit not only of king, not only to protect the king and his household. But to serve the people because with that key, he could open and shut the care for the people through the king. A powerful symbol of authority and responsibility, for not only the king's household, but for the people whom the king led.

In the Gospel we hear Peter blurting something out, as usual. Jesus asks, "Who do people say that I am?" And we know the answer. Prophets this and that. And Moses. Then Jesus looks to the apostles and says to them, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter blurts out, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!**"

He is the Messiah. He is the Son of God. That is a powerful statement of faith. And it goes on to say very clearly that it wasn't Peter who came up with the idea. It was God who gave that idea to him. And using Peter as the agent, He speaks it. A powerful moment in the Gospel.

And because Peter allowed God's truth to flow through him, Jesus says, "Oh, blessed are you Simon Peter." You didn't say this on your own, but the Father gave it to you. "Therefore, I call you Petros." You will be Petra = Peter = Rock. (Same root word.) "And upon this Rock, I will build my Church."

The Church, the assembly of the Faithful, Apostles and others. "And the gates of the netherworld shall not have power over it. And I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven." Not there (pointing to his shoulder), but I'm sure you've seen in art, whether it's a statue, a painting, a fresco... Or like at Ss. Peter and Paul Cathedral, in a mosaic in the apse – keys in Peter's hand. They are a symbol of the charge and responsibility that he has been given.

Yes. He is the first to speak this faith and he is charged to care for the faith, to care for what Jesus teaches and to care for the people that are The Church.

Now, Peter didn't ask for this. It was given to him by Messiah, the Son of God. And over the centuries, his authority - if you will - symbolized by the keys, has been passed down time and time again to the popes. They weren't originally called "Pope." That came a little later.

What were they charged with? The same things: First, unity and peace within the Body. Second, to bind and to loose – that is to forgive sins, or to hold back forgiveness. Or in some cases to excommunicate or re-communicate someone who's really been living outside of the Faith. And (third) to care for the teachings that are handed down.

And for 2,000 years, that has continued. For better, or for worse, because we know some who have been Pope weren't the most savory people. They were ambitious, like Shebna.

But God chooses human beings to be his agents. What's wrong with you, God? Look at them! Look at Shebna and then look at Eliakim. Eliakim does well for a while. He helps negotiate with Sennacherib, leaving Jerusalem alone. Good job! But then he gets weak and he gets replaced.

And we know Peter - just two verses after he has been told that he's got the keys and everything, and Jesus is so proud of him - he tells Jesus, "No! You can't die!" And Jesus says, "Get behind me, you satan! You tempter."

Why does God choose such agents, these human beings? Couldn't God just zap us? You know, zap us with the truth. Zap us with that which would motivate us to live out our Faith. But God generally doesn't work that way, does God?

What's the first example? The prophets, Moses, Abraham.

Another example: Jesus, himself. He is fully human and fully divine. That's what we believe. But we know that he continued to go to the Father in prayer again and again and again, because he was human. And that relationship had to be built for him to fulfill his mission in his humanity.

So God chooses human beings as his agents. And we still have them. The Church is full of them. How many here are parents? Raise your hand. Are you not charged with passing on the Faith? Are you not the keeper of that to share with your children? Who gave it to you? The Lord. You have a certain level of authority.

Yes. There are popes and bishops and archbishops. The archbishops and the bishops are the successors of the Apostles, who worked together to maintain unity, to maintain the gift of God's mercy, to maintain the wonder of the teachings of 2,000 years, set down and passed on.

But there are catechists. There are DREs, deacons, lay folks. And deacons and priests who help distribute the gift of the Sacraments. Right, Jill? Right, Fletcher?

What happened last week in this church? Your daughter was married. Who married your daughter? Fr. Mike first, Jesus, God...but who married your daughter? **Sam!** Who exchanged the vows? (The couple, Sam and Emma) They acted in Sacrament.

That authority is shared. And it is terribly important that we grasp that. Yes. Pray for those who lead us. Pray for those who are given greater responsibility. Pray for each other. And realize that the root of the Synod on synodality that's coming up rests here, in this Gospel and the other ways that we've come to express ourselves over 2,000 years as Church.

What a gift! God trusts us and he entrusts us to care for his leaders, to listen to them, to learn, disagree, but always realizing we're following the Lord, first and foremost.