

FROM FATHER JOHN: *“Jesus said to him in reply, ... ‘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. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’”* (Matthew 16:17 – 19)



Sometimes someone will ask me why a priest is able to forgive sins in the Sacrament of Confession. It's an interesting question because if we look at Matthew's gospel (see quote above) our Lord Jesus gives the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven to St. Peter as the rock on whom our Lord Jesus built His Church. I personally find it amazing that the power that our Lord and Savior gave to St. Peter has been given to me. It's easy to see that St. Peter was given the power to forgive sins but then the question becomes how does this power flow, two-thousand years later, from St. Peter to a simple priest in a parish in Channahon, Illinois?

It has to do with two facts. One fact is that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride. The second fact is that the priest holds an Office of the Church that administers the sacraments.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that *“The unity of Christ and the Church, head and members of one Body, also implies the distinction of the two within a personal relationship. This aspect is often expressed by the image of bridegroom and bride. The theme of Christ as Bridegroom of the Church was prepared for by the prophets and announced by John the Baptist. The Lord*

referred to himself as the 'bridegroom.' The Apostle speaks of the whole Church and of each of the faithful, members of his Body, as a bride 'betrothed' to Christ the Lord so as to become but one spirit with him. The Church is the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb. 'Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her.' He has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant and never stops caring for her as for his own body." (#796)

Blessed Isaac of Stella was born around the year 1100 A.D. He was a Cistercian monk and abbot at their monastery in Citeaux, which is near Dijon, France. He was a contemporary of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. He was known for his holiness and the many homilies, letters and treatises he wrote. His goal was to help his brother monks advance in the spiritual life. He died in 1169 A.D.

He gave a homily entitled *Christ will forgive no sin without the Church*. In it, he explains that "*The Church is incapable of forgiving any sin without Christ, and Christ is unwilling to forgive any sin without the Church.*" In doing so, he gives us a good answer to the question of why a priest is able to forgive sins in the Sacrament of Confession.

May God Bless you and all those who love the Lord!

From Blessed Isaac of Stella, abbot

"The prerogative of receiving the confession of sin and the power to forgive sin are two things that belong properly to God alone. We must confess our sins to him and look to him for forgiveness. Since only he has the power to forgive sins, it is to him that we must make our confession. But when the Almighty, the Most High, wedded a bride who was weak and of low estate, he made that maid-servant a queen. He took her from her place behind him, at his feet, and enthroned her at his side. She had been born from his side, and therefore he betrothed her to himself. And as all that belongs to the Father belongs also to the Son because by nature they are one, so also the bridegroom gave all he had to the bride and he shared in all that was hers. He made her one both with himself and with the Father. Praying for his bride, the Son said to the Father: *I want them to be one with us, even as you and I are one.*

And so the bridegroom is one with the Father and one with the bride. Whatever

he found in his bride alien to her own nature he took from her and nailed to his cross when he bore her sins and destroyed them on the tree. He received from her and clothed himself in what was hers by nature and gave her what belonged to him as God. He destroyed what was diabolical, took to himself what was human, and conferred on her what was divine. So all that belonged to the bride was shared in by the bridegroom, and he who had done no wrong and on whose lips was found no deceit could say: *Have pity on me, Lord, for I am weak*. Thus, sharing as he did in the bride's weakness, the bridegroom made his own her cries of distress, and gave his bride all that was his. Therefore, she too has the prerogative of receiving the confession of sin and the power to forgive sin, which is the reason for the command: *Go, show yourself to the priest*.

The Church is incapable of forgiving any sin without Christ, and Christ is unwilling to forgive any sin without the Church. The Church cannot forgive the sin of one who has not repented, who has not been touched by Christ; Christ will not forgive the sin of one who despises the Church. *What God has joined together, man must not separate. This is a great mystery, but I understand it as referring to Christ and the Church*.

Do not destroy the whole Christ by separating head from body, for Christ is not complete without the Church, nor is the Church complete without Christ. The whole and complete Christ is head and body. This is why he said: *No one has ever ascended into heaven except the Son of Man whose home is in heaven*. He is the only man who can forgive sin."