

A Reflection on the Gospel for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear St. Joseph Parishioners,



On this 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time in today's Gospel we see Jesus establishing a sacred order. He begins by telling Simon his insight ("You are the Christ, Son of the Living God") did not come from the natural order, but from the Father. Then he changes Simon's name to Rock, stating that upon him he will build his church. Those words rankle people who want Jesus' Church to become a free-flowing, egalitarian institution. But it gets worse.

Jesus not only identifies Peter as the rock foundation of his Church, he gives him extraordinary powers. The Old Testament lesson tells about Eliakim who replaces a palace official named Shebna. The process involved having the "key of the house of David" placed on his shoulder. It gave him an authority next to the King. Likewise, Jesus entrusts the "keys of the kingdom" to Peter, so he can open and shut, loose and bind.

So, what happened to the keys? Were they buried with Peter?" They were not. He passed them to his successor, in this case Linus, who in turn gave them to Cletus. When I ask the students of St. Joseph Catholic School who holds the keys today, they know the answer: Pope Francis. That Jesus meant the keys to be handed on is evident from his words, "the gates of the nether-world shall not prevail against it (my church)."

Thus Jesus established a sacred order, a hierarchy for his Church. It does not mean every utterance of the pope will be correct. Nor does it mean his every action will be holy. History unfortunately provides many examples to the contrary. But it does mean we can trust that the Holy Spirit will use the magisterium, which Jesus set up, to give us sound doctrine.



This is no small guarantee. When you consider how many divergent teachings have sprung up (all of them claiming a Scriptural basis) it is quite amazing the 267 popes from Peter to Francis have held such a steady course. Small credit goes to human holiness or wisdom. Even Peter, so close to Christ, made embarrassing stumbles. For the Petrine office we can only give credit to Christ and his Holy Spirit. He willed a sacred order for his Church. Our task today is to see beyond scandals and disappointments – and to find our place within that order.

Have a Blessed Week!

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