

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Feb 22nd 2024

Key & The Door

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Peter's Basilica – the Chair of Peter. It is a good opportunity to intensify our prayer of intercession for the Bishop of Rome and his "Petrine ministry" at the service of charity among all the scattered churches in the world. The liturgy of the Word that accompanies this celebration leads us to rediscover the essentials of each ministerial service within the Church, called to be the universal sacrament of salvation.

Peter in today's gospel is given the keys and the power of binding and loosing but this power is not reserved for Peter, but is given soon after, to the whole community (Mt 18:18; cf. Jn 20:23).

Why does Jesus use this image of the keys? The rabbis were convinced that they possess the "keys of the Torah" because they knew the Scriptures. They believed that everyone had to depend on them, for doctrinal decisions and judgments. They felt entitled to discriminate between the just and unjust, between saints and sinners.

Jesus takes up this image in his harsh criticism against the scribes when he says: "A curse is on you, teachers of the Law, for you have taken the key of knowledge. You yourselves have not entered and you prevented others from entering" (Lk 11:52). Instead of opening the door of salvation, they kept them closed, not revealing to the people the true face of God and his will.

Today, Jesus announces a reversal of power. He says, the key which is abusively appropriated by the scribes, is now taken away from them and is given to the community of believers. The key that allows one to enter God's kingdom is the faith professed by Peter. Peter and his companions now have the Mission entrusted to them to open wide the entrance to the knowledge of Christ and his gospel. Anyone who desires to walk in shall do so by using the key of faith: Profess your faith as Peter did: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

As the old saying goes, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely", the Church has failed many times to understand the role of this key of the Kingdom. Like the Rabbis of Jesus' times, leaders of the community misunderstood "the key" as the source of power and failed to realise it as means of service. The Church, over the centuries has so many times failed to be a sign of love and unity, instead became an expression of power.

Is our Church – you and me - still wielding power and showing our might instead of being in humble service of God's household?

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