



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

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"And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" Matt 16:18

This Sunday our Gospel is one of the most important passages in scripture (*Matt 16:15-17*). *"Simon Peter said in reply, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" In Mark 8:29, the earliest of the four gospels, this passage is the central fulcrum. Everything up to this passage is preparation and everything that follows it is explanation. Matthew adds special features of his own to the account (recalling Jeremiah, for instance, who is the image of a suffering spokesperson for God), but the burden of the text is the same in both: Jesus is firmly identified by the apostles as the Messiah, the anointed one promised by God to be the savior.*

The entrusting of the keys of the kingdom is an echo from Isaiah 22:23 in the first reading for today's liturgy, *"I will place the key... on Eliakim's shoulder... I will fix him like a peg in a sure spot."* For Christians, these keys are a powerful icon of the authority entrusted to the church. It gives it the power to continue after Jesus' resurrection and return to the Father. In the Jewish Orthodox synagogal tradition the image of the keys entrusted to the rabbi has real disciplinary, doctrinal and juridical force. Jesus in today's Gospel passes these powers on universally and spiritually as we consider the primal sacramental nature of the Church Christ left us. It incarnates the essence of God's grace made flesh. It unites heaven and earth in a complex spiritual/human reality. In this sacramental moment, the "keys" given to Peter is the first in a chain of apostolic succession down to today where earth is united with heaven.

The role of Peter as the rock upon which the church is founded is a critical feature of this text. Matthew has Jesus speaking the Greek words *Petros* and *petra* ("rock" in Greek). In Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus and his apostles, the word would be *kepa*. Elsewhere in scripture, Peter is referred to by the name *"Kephas."* Throughout the centuries, many writers highlight the fact that something so great and so significant as the Christian church was founded by *Petros, upon this petra!*

The dual action of Peter's spiritual awakening that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and the giving of the "keys" anchors this Truth and unfolds authoritative teaching, unlocking revelation for us. The forging of the two concepts of "Church on Earth" with the "Kingdom of God" creates one firm foundation. Petrine Ministry, then, is the service of St. Peter and his successors that unite Christians throughout the world, bringing about heavenly realities on earth through the Christian spirit in communion and charity.

This week, reflect on this complex temporal and eternal reality of our Church. As you pray the Our Father, *"Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* may you transcend the bounds of mortal time and bathe in the eternal life where joy flows abundantly from *The Rock, Petra* granting us the pathway to the New Jerusalem.

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples,

"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them,

"But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter said in reply,

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus said to him in reply,

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.

For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.

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."

Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

The Gospel of the Lord