

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah 22:19-23 Romans 11:33-36

Matthew 116:13-20

BLESSING GIVEN TO PETER

Above the sanctuary of Saint Peter's basilica in Rome, you read this promise of Jesus to Peter, his chief apostle: ***"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.. I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."***

Catholics consider these words as the basis for the papacy.

With these words the bishop of Rome is considered as

- the successor to Peter as chief spokesman and
- the holder of the spiritual power of the keys.

We must not be too simplistic in how we apply those words to the original Peter and even more so to his successors.

Our brothers in the Protestant churches, do not accept that there could be any succession, in the full sense, to the position held by Saint Peter.

- They find any claims to "apostolic jurisdiction" or "the power of the keys" to be out of harmony with the Gospel message.
- They interpret today's Gospel differently.

Q: So do we need to insist that the Roman way is the only way of interpreting Christ's words to Peter?

Are we going about singing: ***"My religion is better than yours?"***

In spite of different opinions between various church traditions, I think this Gospel deserves close attention for what it says about faith, leadership, and guidance.

At this stage, just as our Lord is provoking a personal answer with the question ***"Who do you say that I am?"*** each one of us must make a personal answer about what Jesus says about Peter today.

For sure, as this Gospel stands (take it as my personal answer) the blessing is given to Peter in particular!

- It is to this Peter that Jesus entrusts whatever is meant by ***"the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven."***

- Respecting Peter's primacy will enable the Church to always rely on his position for unity and encouragement.

The keys, which are so much the source of concern and bone of so much contention are mainly for opening.

There are so doors that lock by themselves and this is where the keys have an important role – not for locking out anybody!!

The task is not one of stern domination, or merely of the efficient organisation of Christ's Church.

- He was appointed to feed the lambs and sheep.
- He was appointed to confirm his brothers.
- He was appointed to be servant

In the first epistle of St Peter, elders or leaders are asked to ***"tend the flock of God, not as domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock"*** (5:13.)

Today we particularly remember the present successor of Peter, Francis our Pope;

- that God may establish him in faith and wisdom;
- that being strong in himself, he may confirm his brothers;
- and that as Chief Shepherd he may help us on our way to the Kingdom.

