

**“I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 16:19) 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday  
August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 (Is 22:19-22, Rom 11:33-36, Matt 16:13-16)**

I begin my reflection with Paul’s beautiful doxology, which is a hymn of praise in our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading. Paul is in a state of jubilant praise of the riches and wisdom of God even in the midst of his complex life and teachings. The conclusion of Paul’s hymn is very familiar to us at mass which the priest sings or recites at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer. “For from Him and through Him and in Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.” Like Paul, all of us have every reason to give glory and praise to God because he is the source of all things and all things are ordered towards Him. He is worthy of all praise and glory.

The top of St. Peter’s Basilica Sanctuary in Rome has the words, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my church. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven.” Catholics believe that these words apply to the Pope as the successor of Peter who speaks infallibly on the church’s faith and holds the power of the keys. Today’s readings encourage us to express our faith in Jesus, but they are also about leadership in the Church. Peter had expressed his faith in Jesus and in return, Jesus blessed him and made him the head of the church.

In our first reading Isaiah prophesies that Eliakim would be chosen by God to replace Shebna, the master of the palace, because he had turned away from God. Shebna was making decisions for the people contrary to the mind of God and he was selfish as well. Isaiah says that God would place the keys of David on Eliakim’s shoulders and whatever door he opens shall remain open and whatever door he shuts shall remain shut. Eliakim is a clear picture of Jesus our Messiah in

today's gospel. Jesus also gives Peter the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to open and to shut, to bind and to loose. Revelation 3:7 says, "He who has the key of David, He who opens, and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens." So, Jesus has the authority to open and shut doors in our lives as he pleases. We may be weeping because there are closed doors in our lives, we are therefore called upon to follow Jesus who has the keys.

In our Gospel, Jesus decides to ask his disciples one simple question and to do that, he had to take them for a 25-mile walk from the north of the Sea of Galilee to the region of Caesarea Philippi. Now, why did Jesus have to walk with them for 25 miles? Because this one question is so important that Jesus had to create a stage by bringing the disciples to that region because of its political and geographical significance. Caesarea Philippi is a city of political power with their Temples rededicated by King Philip to honor Caesar. Geographically, Caesarea Philippi was built upon a huge 10 storey rock and the city walls were also made out of rock. It is here that Jesus refers to Peter as rock (Petra in Greek, Kephias in Aramaic). It is on Peter the rock that Jesus builds his church.

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" It is easier to guess what Jesus mean to people in general. They told him people say that he is Elijah, others say John the Baptist or one of the prophets. But Christ asks them to reach inside themselves and tell him, "Who do you say I am?" This question asks each of us to say who is Jesus for me personally? It takes more reflections to say what Jesus means to me personally. It is important because Jesus wants us to express our personal faith in Him. Keys are mainly for openings because many doors lock by

themselves. Faith in Jesus is the key to opening the mysteries of God. Paul did not say, “I know what I have believed”, he said, “I know whom I have believed” (2Timothy 1:12). Knowing who Jesus is for me personally will be the reason to hope when it seems hopeless, the reason to persevere in face of suffering and the reason to cope with life. **Amen. By Fr. Emmanuel Subaar**