

Homily081620

## POWER, AUTHORITY AND THE GATES OF HELL

Lost your keys recently? Don't you hate that when you just want to grab your keys, get in the car and go but suddenly your keys are not there? Keys. A fundamental part of our daily lives. They are different now. I still have keys I wear on a lanyard around my neck but getting into the Parish Center or Rectory is by digital code now rather than a physical key. Even the key for us to drive a new car has changed. Now the key has to be present but actually you press a button. That was the way it was sixty years ago too.

We need keys because we need locks. We need lots of keys because we have lots of locks. Keys are featured in a couple of the readings today. In Isaiah the prophet, a palace official named Shebna who was the official Keeper of the Royal Keys has gotten so full of himself that he has amassed a fortune and is having a huge tomb erected for himself. Shebna has forgotten that the king himself is in service to the Lord not himself. Shebna is going to be dismissed, demoted and downgraded. He is going to be replaced because he was not doing what the Lord wanted done. He misused his power. He misused his authority. He used it only to enhance himself and his own situation.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus asks what the rumor mill is saying about him and hears all the various choices. Jesus then asks those whom he has called, his apostles: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter pipes us: "The Messiah. The Son of the Living God." Jesus is surprised by this but pleasantly so. Jesus speaks a confirming word and a profound truth. "Peter, you didn't just come to this on your own. My Father has actually revealed this to you. And if you are the one my Father has chosen to reveal this to then that is good enough for me. That is foundational. Peter, you are the rock on which I will build my church. Your faith, your openness to the Father's Word, your love of me are the foundations for my Church.

In that moment Jesus entrusts to Peter the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. What does that mean? Keys are used to secure what is of value. Keys are used to provide access or deny access to what is inside. Keys are necessary to open and to shut. Jesus is an authentic figure. A human being but more. Jesus is a man of authority, a man of power. This authority and this power has been entrusted to him by his heavenly Father. Jesus now, in turn, entrusts it to Peter—not just for Peter to have for himself like Shebna was doing. Jesus entrusts power and authority to Peter so that Peter will help everyone to be drawn close and into union with Christ.

Notice what Jesus says. You can bind and loose. And that will be ratified in heaven. Pretty amazing. But notice what Jesus does not say. You can change what I have entrusted to you and conform it to whatever is popular in the culture. Nothing like that at all. Peter, you can tweak. When things get too tight, you can loosen. When things are a bit too loose, you can tighten. But not change my teaching. Not change my revelation. Because my revelation, the Good News, is true and unchangeable.

So, you have some power. Not a great deal but some. You have authority. Not a great deal but some. I have power and authority. Not a great deal but some. How are you using your power and your authority? Are you lording it over those around you—in your family, at work, in the community? Are you using your power and authority to serve, to assist, to help? Or are you making

others serve you? As Pastor, do I put aside the gospel of Jesus Christ and substitute my own sense of what I think the teaching should be? Or do I remain true to the essence of Christ's teaching but occasionally tweaking it? Here tightening up somewhat; there loosening the constraints a bit?

My friends, it is in how we use our power and authority in the day in, day out situations of life that you and I answer the question that Jesus asked of his apostles: Who do you say that I am? Is Jesus the One whose teaching can be shunted aside and substituted for when his teaching proves unpopular? Or is Jesus the One to whom I show my allegiance and loyalty despite the voices disputing his moral way of life? In other words, am I building on a truly rock foundation in my parish, my community, my family, my life? Or am I caving in and building on a sandy foundation which looks good now but will not withstand the storm which inevitably comes? Let each of us today stand with Peter and say: You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I seek to enter into communion with you, O Lord—first, foremost and forever! My friends, that is the key.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.