

[Readings: Isaiah 22:19-23; Psalm 138; Romans 11:33-36; Matt 16:13-20]

While praying over the readings for today and reading some of the commentaries, I had a flashback to my dear mom giving me the key to the front door of our house on Detroit's east side. We kids were still in grade school, Mom had just started a new job. That meant that now we had to take brown bag lunches to school and let ourselves in the house in the afternoon. We didn't know back then that my siblings and I were now "latch-key children."

As she gave us each a key, her parting words touched my heart and seared into my memory: "Now don't lose them!" Sound familiar?

I and my siblings gave Mom the usual reaction: a sigh and the roll of the eyes! "We won't, Mom." The first week I was entrusted with the key, I lost it. Mom was right! How do moms know? "Don't lose the keys!"

Keys are important in today's First Reading and Gospel. Keys are significant, because the more you have, or the bigger they are, the more responsible you are expected to be. That's why we give people the symbolic "key to the city." It means that we have access always and everywhere, whenever we want. I guess I'm pretty responsible with 28 keys on my key ring!

Shebna is the fellow in today's reading from Isaiah who gets the wrath of prophecy. He was the prime minister of the time and used his power to grant access or to deny access to the king to his financial advantage. His authority was represented by the large key he carried on his shoulder as a sign of his office. He built an elaborate tomb for himself. He collected expensive chariots. He suggested that the King form a political alliance with Egypt against Assyria.

Elaikim would follow Shebna, but HIS track record wasn't much better. He, too, falls out of favor with Isaiah. Not only was Eliakim a doorkeeper, he had access to royal employment, benefits and privileges. And he let that corrupt him.

St. Paul tells us in our Second Reading that it is difficult, if not impossible, to know the mind of God, let alone to presume to speak for Him. Why is this so?

We as a Church get it right most of the time because we have the Holy Spirit guiding us as Jesus promised, and scores of generations of experience to

guide us. Why did you drive the car that brought you here to Mass today? Did you design the car? Did you build it? No. You trusted the engineer and the mechanic. Did you design and build the house you live in? Probably not. But you certainly trusted the architect and the construction manager that when you enter your house the roof won't fall on your head. So it is with the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church. We trust the Holy Spirit and 2000 years of experience and tradition.

We hear today the inspired words of St. Peter in today's Gospel. Because of his insight which came not from his own noggin but from God, Jesus rewards Peter with the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, with the power, the authority to open and close, to loosen and to bind.

Much can be said about what Peter was not. His faith faltered in moments of crisis, as when he tried to walk on water. He lacked courage in the face of outside challenge; witness his waffling on the matter of eating with Gentiles in Acts. Peter could not be depended on for loyalty, a failing that grieved him terribly in the time of his historic denial. He was as capable of getting the answer very wrong as well as spectacularly right. It is obvious that Peter was not chosen to lead the Church because he was perfect. His appointment did not come as a result of his strengths any more than it did in spite of his weaknesses. What made Peter a good choice, the premiere choice, is that the Holy Spirit demonstrably could work with him.

It has been pointed out that the Church is always one generation from extinction. Looking at our dwindling numbers at Sunday Mass in our Church, that may not be far from the truth! If you and I don't spread the Gospel, it will be just one generation away from disappearing from the face of the earth. It is compelling, isn't it? It enhances our sense of Christian responsibility. We need to get out there and work for the Gospel, or the Church could fade into history.

Although Jesus Christ probably would not recognize the patriarchal and hierarchical Roman Catholic Church of the 21st Century, He did nonetheless

found a Church to carry on His divine mission after His death, Resurrection and return to the Father. A community of believers, brought together in faith, empowered by the Holy Spirit and commissioned for service until the end of the ages. We also remember that each of us also are entrusted with certain “keys” – the chance to open rather than close the way to Jesus. To build more bridges than we burn. To welcome more people than we turn away. To serve more people than we refuse. The great American humorist Will Rogers once said, “Even if we are on the right track, we will get run over if we just sit there!”

The prophet Micah put it this way: “do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with Your God.” Jesus gave St. Peter “the keys.” What are “the keys?”

What are the keys? The gates of hell are unlocked by Sacraments; they open the way to eternal life. When a priest “looses” (releases) the grace and forgiveness of God upon a repentant sinner during the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or when a priest “binds” a man and woman together in the Sacrament of Marriage, it’s Jesus who’s doing it through him.

The supernatural power of the Sacraments conquers evil every time we take them seriously and rely on the graces they provide. Where is there a locked gate in your life, which needs to get blown open so that Jesus can rescue you from some sort of darkness? What will you do this week to utilize the Sacraments more deeply, more profoundly? Who do you say Jesus really is, and how do you encounter this Jesus in the Sacraments? Which Sacrament (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Marriage, Ordination, or the Anointing of the Sick) is most powerful for you personally? Why? Where does Mary fit in?

We pray for her intercession and protection. We listen to her as we would listen to our own mothers when she says to us as she said of her own Son: “Do whatever He tells you.” I can also hear her saying this to us as well: “My Son Jesus has given you the keys. Remember: Now don’t lose them!” AMEN!