

TRINITY 11
Isaiah 22:19-23
Rom 11:33-36
Mt 16:13-20

When it comes to it, Isaiah knows exactly how to deliver an attack on a person who in his opinion is doing the wrong thing. Shebna was the highest-ranking office holder in the Jewish Kingdom but he was pretentious. He behaved as though he were a member of the aristocracy. He was an able administrator but was a political opportunist and social climber who pitted himself against Isaiah who as God's prophet, proclaimed God's will rather than what was politically acceptable to the authorities. Isaiah ensured that Shebna was moved sideways in the administration and Eliakim, one who shared Isaiah's views about what was God's truth, was appointed as the king's steward.

The gospel reading tells of Peter's revelation of God's truth that Jesus was to gather together the Church, the community united with God under a new Covenant. Jesus was to have the same relationship with this community as God had with the Children of Israel under the old Covenant. This reading tells us that the Church is founded on solid rock; is able to withstand the forces of evil in the world and describes Peter's authority within it.

In response to Jesus' question to his disciples about the identity of the Son of Man, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God. Jesus acknowledges that such a profound statement could only have been revealed by the Father, so He says, "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church." Some people say that the words 'this rock' refer to Peter himself, while others say that it refers to the statement of faith that Peter had just made. Certainly Peter's statement about Jesus' identity is the sure foundation upon which the faith of the Church is built. Is Jesus fully God and fully human? If not, Christianity has nothing different to offer the world than any other religion.

This truth was revealed to Peter. Peter and his Statement of Faith stand together, so Peter was appointed leader of the Church despite his flaws and shortcomings. Jesus assures Peter that the forces of evil will not overcome the Church despite how it may appear to be at times. The forces of evil spawn the culture of death beneath a veneer of compassion and caring. Take note of the language used for passing off abortion and euthanasia as health care. The forces of evil uses its agents in the world to destroy Christ's Church through whatever means are necessary, but if Jesus' committed disciples keep the Faith revealed by God, all attacks will be repelled.

Because of the heavenly Father's revelation to Peter, he is given the keys of the kingdom. This does not mean that Peter is the heavenly concierge opening the pearly gates for invited guests. The keys are the sign of authority. Think back to our first reading. When Isaiah had Eliakim installed as the chief steward, he placed the keys of David's kingdom on his shoulder. He was given authority within the kingdom. So Peter was given authority within the Church. With this authority, in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter made decisions about rules and was able to promulgate authorised decisions based on the teaching of Jesus. He was also able to decide on the limits of belief and morals for the Christian faithful.

While Peter is the leader, he is not an unbridled dictator, he is to be a servant leader who leads with and alongside the other apostles. This has been the situation throughout the history of the Catholic Church and remains so today. Like Jesus, the authority of Peter and his successors is that of the shepherd who calls Christ's flock to be in unity with him and with each other. This is why the Catholic Church never closes the door to other Christians who seek to be in true organic unity with her, and many of us here have accepted that invitation. To be in communion means precisely that – to share a common union of faith, belief and moral principles. Without that unity gathered around Peter and his successors, the Church would be a loose federation of independent groups believing that they are in unity merely because they call themselves Christian.

Some of us know this from our earlier life experience, and this is why we must stand firm and repel the forces of evil infecting the Catholic Church from destroying that unity from within.

As St Ambrose said in the 4th century, '*Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia*,' 'Where Peter is, there is the Church.'

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August 2020