

First reading Isaiah 22:15, 19-23

‘I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David.’

Thus says the Lord God of hosts, ‘Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the household, and say to him: “I will thrust you from your office, and you will be pulled down from your station. In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand. And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honour to his father’s house.” ’

Responsorial Psalm 138(137): 1-3, 8 R8

**O Lord, your merciful love is eternal;
discard not the work of your hands.**

I thank you, Lord, with all my heart;
you have heard the words of my mouth.
In the presence of the angels I praise you.
I bow down towards your holy Temple.

I give thanks to your name
for your merciful love and your faithfulness.
On the day I called, you answered me;
you increased the strength of my soul.

The Lord is high, yet he looks on the lowly,
and the haughty he knows from afar.
O Lord, your merciful love is eternal;
discard not the work of your hands.

Second reading Romans 11:33-36

‘From him and through him and to him are all things.’

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.

Gospel Acclamation Matthew 16:18

Alleluia, alleluia.

You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church,
and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Alleluia.

Gospel Matthew 16:13-20

‘You are Peter, and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’

At that time: When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others

Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

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Feast days this week

Monday 24th August: St Bartholomew

Tuesday 25th August: St Louis

Wednesday 26th August: Blessed Dominic of the Mother of God, St David Lewis (Wales)

Thursday 27th August: St Monica

Friday 28th August: St Augustine

Saturday 29th August: The Beheading of St John the Baptist

The Cycle of Prayer**A Deeper Understanding between Christians and Jews****Prayer**

*Let us pray also for the Jewish people,
to who the Lord our God spoke first,
that he may grant them to advance in love of his name
and in faithfulness to his covenant.
Almighty ever-living God,
who bestowed your promises on Abraham and his
descendants,
graciously hear the prayers of your Church,
that the people you first made your own
may attain the fullness of redemption.*

Roman Missal

Shepherd and Rock

Above the sanctuary of Saint Peter's basilica in Rome, written in huge lettering of gold mosaic, is this promise of Jesus to 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." These words are held by Catholics as the basis for the papacy, applying to the bishop of Rome as the successor to Peter, to be the chief spokesman for the church's living faith, and wielder 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. Non-catholic Christians, our brethren 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 juridical and absolute authority for the papacy, under titles like "apostolic jurisdiction" or "the power of the keys" to be out of harmony with the Gospel message. They interpret differently what today's Gospel means for leadership in the Church. We need not insist that the Roman way is the only way of taking Christ's words. Still, this Gospel deserves close attention for what it says about faith, enlightenment and leadership, and guidance for our own lives.

Each must make a personal answer to Our Lord's question: "Who do you say that I am?" although Peter's credo is a solid basis from which to begin. Notice the beautiful phrase: "Son of the Living God," expressing more richly what "Christ" means. Peter's worshipful faith comes to him as gift from above, not from any mere logic or ingenuity. Why was the blessing given to him in particular? Perhaps because his humble and contrite spirit made him best prepared to receive it? Or because God chooses whom He wills, irrespective of their merits? It is to this Peter that Jesus entrusts whatever is meant by the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Upon his solid, dedicated faith the Church will always rely, for unity and encouragement. Keys are mainly for opening; many doors lock by themselves. We could reflect further on Peter's task, as seen in other Gospel passages (Mat. 14:28ff; 17:24ff; Lk. 22:32; Jn. 21:15-17) , and in the Acts (1:1 5ff; 2: 14ff; 3:1 2ff) .

While he is appointed to "feed the lambs and sheep" of Christ, to "confirm his brethren," and welcome the first pagan convert into the Church, Peter is no plaster saint. Weakness of faith (when he began to sink) , rash self-confidence and eventual denial are also portrayed by him. But these serve only to underline the grandeur of his conversion, when with a new clarity of self-knowledge he turns and says to Jesus: "You know that I love you." The task is not one of stern domination, or merely of the efficient organisation of Christ's Church. Pastor and penitent at once, convert and the support for other converted sinners, he leads the faithful by witness and example. This pastoral understanding of authority finds a lovely echo in the first epistle of 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.) Just so, Peter tended the early church by sharing his deep faith in Christ the Risen Lord. So, he kept them united in a community of mutual love, and in faithful obedience to the Gospel. Such an ideal situation of harmony in the Church is briefly sketched for us in the Acts (2:42ff; 4:32f)

What of today's Church, spread in all continents, united under the leadership of pope Leo? How can this work of teaching, encouraging and uniting so many millions of baptised believers be carried on? Jesus remains at the centre, as the Christ, Son of the Living God, and he continues to be the Church's true Rock. We today, just as much as in the time of St Peter, need the ministry of faithful apostles, entrusted by Christ to build up his people, witness to the faith, and provide leadership in Christian love. Pope, bishops, priests and other ministries exist in order to serve. But in some sense, we get the service that we deserve. It is for us to make known to our pastors both our appreciation and our loyal criticisms; especially to pray for them, for their courage and perseverance. Today we particularly remember the present successor of Peter, our Pope; that God may establish him in faith and wisdom; that being strong in himself, he may confirm the brethren; and that as Chief Shepherd he may help us on our way to the Kingdom. associationofcatholicpriests.ie