

21st (SJ&QA) Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

“I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.” What is the significance and meaning of a key? In the first reading, by divine decree, Eliakim replaces Shedna as master of the palace. His great authority is symbolized by the key of the house of David. This means that Eliakim will determine who gains admission to the palace and who does not. Similarly, our Gospel sheds light on the commissioning of Simon after Jesus did a survey about the public perception of him through his disciples. *“And so I say to you, you are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church...I will give you the keys of heaven”* This authority conferred on Simon means he will function as master in the kingdom established by Jesus. He was given a new name and mission. *Why Simon to Peter?* Aliases or nicknames are given to people to describe one of their characteristics. That’s why we call some people Shorty, Sparky, Curly or Skinny or something to that effect.

When Jesus called Simon *‘Petrus’* *‘Keppa-Rock’* he was implying that he was solid and firm, suitable for a foundation. In fact it is rather surprising that Jesus gave Simon this nickname, for at times he exhibited a lot of weakness. He did not only abandon Jesus, but even thrice denied ever knowing his master. When Jesus was arrested Peter was vicious... with his sword he cuts off the soldier’s ear. By man’s standards Peter was a disastrous choice and should never have been appointed. We could hardly describe him as a stable person because at

times he was brave, while on other occasions he displayed complete cowardice.

Why did Jesus choose Simon to be the solid, firm foundation of his Church and leader of his disciples? It's beyond belief that Jesus did select him as the leader because his record would not even have impressed his own contemporaries. If love and loyalty were the basis for leadership it would have gone to John, "*the beloved disciple*". Jesus chose Peter not because of *the strength of his character, but the strength of his faith*. It is not Peter's resume, *but his response in faith to divine revelation that signaled God's choice of him*. Deep down he knew himself to be weak and imperfect, hence, he was convinced that his total security could only come from a power greater than his own. *He stands solid because Jesus prays for him*. He stands firm after the Messiah undergoes his passion and death in Jerusalem. Peter becomes a rock after he has experienced in himself the death and resurrection of Jesus. He dies to his own weaknesses, and recovers to strengthen his brothers and sisters. His call leads to the most important step in the development of the Church. Peter as head of the church is an example of the power of God at work using the weak things of this world to confound the strong. As St. Paul said in the second reading, "*How inscrutable are God's judgments and how unsearchable his ways.*" Peter's weaknesses and moment of betrayal are common-place in our own lives. However, in spite of his shortcomings, Peter is not afraid to

dare and take risks. And he must simply laugh off his mistakes. That is why he is the Chairman of the Board of Twelve. While others wait and watch, Peter steps into the water and asks the Lord to catch him! Jesus' words to Peter make it clear that his appointment is by divine decree. *"For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my heavenly Father."*

Peter will be the rock—foundation of the new people of God gathered by Jesus. He is the first among equals, the *Vicar of Christ* on earth, the *first Pope*. He is the first to believe and he won't be the last. Peter assumes the responsibility of the gatekeeper who opens or closes the gates of the heavenly city. With the key, he is given the authority *"to bind"* and *"to loose,"* that is, *to forbid and to permit. What are keys for you?* The key to a man's heart they say is through his stomach. The key to a woman's heart is to take her shopping. The key to your priest's heart is chocolates. *What are the keys to God's heart?* 1. Humility. *Humility believes that it is not about us but about the Lord.* That it is not our work but God's, and that there is a far superior knowledge and reason above our intelligent ways. Despite his flaws and weaknesses Peter accepted with full responsibility his actions and was able to ask for pardon. 2. Courage. This takes many forms—*being able to dare, being our own person, seeking our own destiny, not being afraid to make mistakes,* and *volunteering ourselves first,* like Peter. Finally, Obedience from the heart: Doing God's will. Then we

can see clearly and say, “Yes” to Jesus, and continue to say, “Yes” to Him and His will. We are God's people. He loves us as His children. Our duty is to pledge our obedience and faithfulness to Him. Then our lives would have order and stability. **To let go and let God is the key to land in God’s arms. *Know Jesus more deeply, follow him more closely, and love him more dearly. Only then, like Peter, we can call ourselves his disciples if we can truly say “You are Christ the Son of the living God!” Amen!***