

TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY A. 2005

It happens sometimes that we give our house key to a trusted friend to take care of our matters while we are away or on vacation. Sometimes we give keys to someone responsible for maintaining or working in a particular building. Keys to vehicles are given to people who have proven themselves to be responsible drivers. Sometimes to one who has abused of our trust or has been unworthy of it, we may say: “give me the keys back“. So there is an undeserved trust and a deserved trust. Today’s readings focus on this kind of trust, the trust that conveys authority and responsibility.

In the first reading, this concept of trust functions in a very contrasted way. Shebna, the master of King’s palace is withdrawn from his job, because he has abused his position. Because of his arrogance and love of power and health, he lost the trust of the Lord. The Lord, therefore, sent Isaiah to announce a new leader. In fact, the wrath of the prophet is aroused by the luxury of Shebna, especially the tomb he has prepared for himself. The prophet sees in this an attempt to control his fate, which will be frustrated by God. He also objects to not heeding the voice of the prophet and to waist away the riches of Israel. Hence the choice of Eliakim to replace him.

In this episode, the symbol of the keys plays a big role. To receive the keys means to have full power on the palace of the king; to dispose of the authority to administrate his goods, and to decide who has to be received and who should be rejected by him. If the governor is described as “the father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah”, this means that his authority is not similar to that of politicians. His power is not an authorization to do and to impose what he likes and even less a right to receive honors and privilege. It consists in being like a father ever ready to sacrifice his life for his children. But, as it is God himself who is the Father of all and the creator of all things, the master of the palace is only an instrument that God uses to govern his people; his authority is an authority by delegation.

As you can see, this text helps to understand the stake of today’s Gospel. But before we deepen it, let us raise some question: how does it come that some loose God’s trust and others not? How does it happen that in an inexplicable way God chooses some and gives them authority over his people? This is a mystery we cannot fully understand. It is this reality that St. Paul explains in the second reading. St. Paul comes to this conclusion while reflecting on the refusal of his compatriots to recognize Jesus as the Messiah - with all the persecutions following it -, but from which God has allowed the entry of the pagans into the church. For him, God’s plans are impenetrable and unforeseeable not only for the history of people, but even for the history of our own individual life. Think about your own life history and you will see how God is bigger than ever. In other words, whether or not we can understand the grace, the wisdom, and the glory of God, we are all entitled to the salvation offered through Jesus Christ. The gift of salvation is not earned as one might earn the gift of trust. In the end, the only thing we can do in our humanity is offer God thanksgiving and praise.

This being said, let us now turn to the Gospel. If in the Gospel Peter is given the keys and

the power to bind and to loose, it means that he is established in the position of leadership and authority. He is declared the master of the palace in the Church, which on him is laid the charge of leading and defending the flock. Peter is made also the solid rock on which the church is built. Actually, he is the building stone, but the foundation is Christ himself.

When Jesus says “on this rock I build my church”, he is referring to the faith in him that Peter has just professed. This faith constitutes the foundation of the church, it makes her invincible and capable of dominating the forces against her for ever. Consequently, all those who, like Peter, profess this faith in Christ-Jesus-the son of the living God are becoming part of this solid building that will never fail.

This is why the authority conferred personally upon Peter is in part conferred on other disciples as much as Peter speaks not only in his name, but also in behalf of his fellow-disciples. The same is true for the keys given to him and the power “to bind and to loose” which belong also to the community. Referring to this text, Vatican II understands the authority of the pope in the same way as the first among his sisters and brothers who presides at the faith, as the servant of the servants. This implies that in the church the Bishop of Rome is the one responsible for maintaining the unity of the faith in Christ professed by Peter.

This statement leads me to point out, finally, that before being made a rock on which the church is built, Peter has first of all confessed the faith in Christ as the son of the living God. This question of the identity of Jesus is very crucial nowadays. If Jesus has to ask us today: “who am I for you”? I guess we would certainly answer with the words of Peter and then would look at him like the students who are sure of having passed their examination. But he would probably insist: no, this is not what you think; you just heard it from others, from the priests, the sisters, the catechists; but for you personally who am I? What influence have I had in your life? What changes has your faith in me brought about in your life? Today we are invited to renew in a personal and individual way our answer to the quest of Jesus: “Who am I for you? These are the questions we have to answer today if we want to be faithful to Jesus.

Let us pray for our pope Benedict the sixteenth and all the leaders of our Church so that they may be guided by the Holy Spirit in this wonderful job the Lord has given them. May he and all who are participating in world youth day see more fully who the Lord is in their life. Let us pray for ourselves and for our priests so that the Lord who uses human beings, you and me, to proclaim his wonders, help us all to be faithful to our vocation. God bless you all!



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