21st A

Papacy

MDP of God

In our gospel today we heard how Jesus renamed a man, whose name was Simon, and gave him a new name “Rock” (which is what Peter means)

We also heard Jesus make some incredible promises about His Church

1st - He says, “I will build my Church on the Rock of Peter”

Notice it’s **Jesus’** Church - and **He’s** the one doing the building of it

2ndly - He promises that the gates of Netherworld will not prevail against the Church

3rd - He gives Peter the keys of the Kingdom of heaven - telling him that what he declares bound on earth will be bound in heaven, and that what he declares loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven

[Jesus didn’t do this – jokes about Peter at gates of heaven]

[I’ve pointed out – in Mat’s gospel – Kingdom of heaven is the Church – weeds & wheat – dragnet with good and bad – not heaven, but the first outpost of heaven here on earth – The Church—where we now are provisional members of the ultimate Kingdom—which is heaven]

So when Jesus gives Peter the keys of the Kingdom of heaven – He’s **establishing an office** *in his Church*

In short, Jesus here is establishing the gift of the papacy

He reinforces this authority that He is given to Peter in other scripture passages as well: For instance

John’s gospel - He gives Peter the Shepherd’s staff (even though Jesus is the good shepherd- **entrusts the flock to Peter**, “Feed my – lambs- sheep- lambs”

In Luke’s gospel – Jesus says that He has prayed that Peter will strengthen the faith of the other apostles when they falter - **but Jesus has prayed that Peter’s faith will never falter**

And so my friends, in light of these readings I’d like to offer to you some reflections on what the Church is - and what the gift of the pope is to the Church

First of all - I want to point out that the Church is not merely a human institution

It is Christ’s Church

It is Christ who builds the Church

The Church is an object of our faith

The Creed “We believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church” - the Church is an object of our faith, **because it’s the work of Christ**

We believe that it is Christ’s Church and that He infallibly guides the teaching of that Church

And so when the Church teaches on faith and morals - it isn’t the personal opinion of the Pope that we can choose to agree with or disagree with -- the Teaching of the Church is **the revelation of God** that we ignore at our own peril

*And God gives us this revelation because He loves us* – He wants us to know right from wrong- good from evil – what He expects and what He forbids

Jesus doesn’t want us to be confused- there’s a lot of confusion in our world today – precisely because many people are not trusting Jesus’ words about His Church and the sure guidance of the Holy Spirit

To better understand Jesus’ gift of the papacy - Have to look closely at these readings, and others

In this reading Jesus gives Peter the keys of the Kingdom

Jesus gets the idea of the keys, from our first reading today

[Our reading from Isaiah who lived 500 years after King David]

The prophet Isaiah, speaks of the **Key** of the House of David

He’s talking about the office of Prime Minister in the OT Kingdom of David – which was meant to be a proto-type of the Church]

In all Kingdoms - including David’s - the King ruled, but He had royal officials who ruled with him

Of all the ministers there was always **one** who was the head of all the rest (Prime Minister, Vicar)

Prime Minister could undo the decisions of lesser ministers - or he could ratify the decisions of the lesser ministers

The Prime Minister was the #2 man in the Kingdom and had tremendous power [The story of Joseph in OT- #2 man under Pharaoh]

In David’s Kingdom the symbol of that office was **the Key** of the Kingdom (The key of the house of David]

In 1st reading today- Shebna, the Prime Minister has lost favor with the Lord and God is going to remove him from office and replace him with Eliakim.

He’ll give Eliakim the Key of the House of David

I want you to notice - that Eliakim will be a **father** to the people of the Kingdom – the one with the keys was a father figure to God’s people

[That’s why we call the pope the Holy Father- He’s a father figure to God’s people- the word pope comes from “papa” or father]

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What is important to realize is that the **Keys symbolize an office** - symbolizes **royal authority** given by the King to someone who will rule in the King’s name

And so in our gospel - Jesus is the King in the line of David

Jesus is establishing an **office with succession-** *Shebna and Eliakim are 500 years after David* - just as there is succession with kings, there is succession with Prime Minister

In OT - kings died and kept changing - In NT, **Jesus is always king**, but His Prime Minister changes- *right now the Prime Minister* **or Vicar of Jesus’ Kingdom**—*is a guy by the name of Francis*

Jesus here is giving His royal authority to Peter - upon whom He says He will build His Church

And He’s giving that authority not only to Peter personally, but with the keys He is establishing an office *that will have succession- and so Peter’s successors will have the same authority Peter had*

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My dear friends, we cannot reject God given authority, without in some way rejecting God who gave the authority

We need to reflect on this, because there are many people today who seem to be betting their salvation on the idea that Jesus won’t be true to His Word [*I think that’s a very foolish bet]*

We live in a day and age when many are rejecting the authority that Our Lord gave to His Vicar- *and that happens out of sinful pride*

There’s an attitude out there of “No one’s going to tell me what to do- to believe- is right and what is wrong///- I’ll decide for myself”

That’s not a humble attitude

*One of the primary reasons that Jesus gave us the papacy was to protect the* *unity of His Church*

He established an authority who could definitively settle disagreements among His people – so that they could stay united and not be torn into competing and rival groups

We see outside the Catholic Church today – thousands of churches which continually split over matters of doctrine and authority – and all this disunity is caused by rejecting the true authority God gave to the pope

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# I ask you to notice what Jesus says here about the Church

He says “I will build my Church” – not churches, ^^^^ (singular)

As you go through scripture you will no where find the phrase, “pick a church, any church “

You will never hear Jesus or Paul or any the apostles indicate that we should go where we’re most comfortable.

In fact the opposite is true

Many Pharisees weren’t comfortable with the teaching of Jesus – Jesus doesn’t say, “That’s okay – you can reject me and stay in the Old Testament system, because it’s important for you to be comfortable” – He doesn’t say that

St. Paul was dealing with Jews who didn’t want to accept the ramifications of Christ’s teaching and with Gentiles who wanted to straddle the fence – ***wanted to be saved in Jesus***, but who wanted to continue living a pagan life (morality wise)

Paul never says to them, “You do what your most comfortable with”

*No, he calls them to do what God wants them to do*

What does Jesus want of His followers today? – **He wants us to be one**

[Preached many times – sin causes disunity-Adam and Eve, Tower of Babal – Jesus came to unite us – to God **and to one another**]

If you look at the 17th chapter of John’s Gospel – we see what theologians refer to as Jesus’ last will and testament - because it occurs the night He is crucified [Last Supper]

And He prays that His followers might all be one, as He and the Father are one.

In fact He prays *that the unity of His followers* **would be so real** – so strong – so visible ***that the world would come to believe in Him because of the unity of His followers***

That’s incredible unity that He calls us too

When you look at the world today – there are over 35,000 different Christian Churches – none of whom agree with each other

[Not what Jesus wanted]

[Only two ways for that unity that He prayed for to be accomplished]

[He could come personally to every individual Christian when they misunderstand and set them right- He obviously has chosen not to do that – or wouldn’t be 35,000 different churches]

**Or-----**He could establish an office in His Church

He could entrust to the one who holds that office **His own authority**, so that what the holder of the office holds bound, Jesus would hold bound]

He could send the Holy Spirit to guide the holder of that office in all truth – *so that His people could know what Jesus wants them to know about faith and morals*

And He could call all of His followers to be meek, gentle of heart, ***and humble enough*** to accept and follow the one who has *this God given authority*

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*That’s God’s plan* – He established His Church on the Rock of Peter [1st pope]

Many people are not comfortable with God’s plan – *but God doesn’t call us to be comfortable*, **He calls us to be faithful.**

I do want to point out that there are many good people outside the Catholic Church *who are striving to be faithful to God*—Most of whom have never had the opportunity to know the authority that God has given to the Vicar of Christ

Good people who often see their churches torn apart over differences in doctrine and authority

We need to share with them the Good News that there is God given authority that we can turn to too know the truth

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We can and should invite them to put themselves under this God given authority *so that the unity Jesus wants for His followers can be accomplished*

My friends, let us thank God for His Infinite Wisdom – recognize that the pope is the vicar of Christ – /// and let us pray that all people will humbly accept His God given authority so that all people can be one as Jesus wants us to be one.