

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 23 AUGUST 2020

The gift of Father on earth which God has given us: “He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah” (Isaiah 22:21).

Dear brothers and sisters, last Sunday the Word of God impressed upon our hearts that our God is the God of all peoples. And he wants us all to be one and to be saved. So he will give us a rallying point for this unity and salvation. This is the gift we have in the Vicar of Christ on earth, Holy Father, the Pope, meaning Papa! The homily centers on this gift of the Father, the Pope, the Vicar of Christ. The first reading and the gospel takes us by the hand into this treasure trove. Beginning with the first reading, “He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. I will place the key of the House of David on Eliakim’s shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut when he shuts, no one shall open” (Isaiah 22:21-22). In the gospel, the Lord says, “I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall

be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:16-18).

Is it not sufficient to have God as our Father? Why do we need Eliakim and Peter? Why is the Lord bestowing such awesome responsibilities on Eliakim and Peter? Who are they? Beginning with the first question, Eliakim son of Hilkiah replaced Shebna as the Master of the palace, during the reign of Hezekiah the king of Judah. Because of some very obvious sins (2 Kings 19:2), the Lord fired Shebna and gave his office over to Eliakim. This was around 704 BC. Eliakim became the majordomo, or the master of the house. His office was much like a combination of the offices of the secretary of state and vice president in a representative democracy as practiced in the United States. The key which the Lord entrusted him made him both a father and a scribe. He not only was entrusted the power of overseer as the master of the palace but he had the authority to interpret Scripture. It is important to remember that the Master of the place is not the king.

In the new kingdom instituted by Christ, which is the fulfilment of the kingdom of David, Peter held this office of the overseer and teacher. Peter was to be a father and an overseer to the people of God, the position held by Eliakim in the OT. Christ is the king.

Speaking to Peter Lord Jesus declared, “I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:16-18). This made Peter a father of God’s people in the name of Christ, *IL PAPA!* This is the origin of the office of the Pope. Peter was the first Pope. Pope derives from the Latin and Italian word, papa. Peter did not receive the office because he was the smartest or the strongest. It was not flesh or blood that revealed it to him. It was granted to him as a gift from God for the benefit of all. In the new kingdom of Jesus, the office of binding and loosing is called **the power of the key, which means the power from Christ to forgive sins in his name.** In Baptism and Confession, we ordinarily receive the forgiveness of sin. The Pope has the authority to not only shepherd the flock of the Lord but to forgive and retain sins in the name of Christ. This is true of Bishops and priests in communion with the Supreme Pontiff.

The Church has received the keys of the Kingdom of heaven so that, in her, sins may be forgiven through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit's action. In this Church, the soul dead through sin comes

back to life in order to live with Christ, whose grace has saved us (CCC 981).

Because of the gift of the keys of the kingdom, may we remember that:

There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive. "There is no one, however wicked and guilty, who may not confidently hope for forgiveness, provided his repentance is honest. Christ who died for all men desires that in his Church the gates of forgiveness should always be open to anyone who turns away from sin (CCC 982)

Jesus said to the Apostles again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:21-23). "Why did God entrust such awesome responsibility to an ordinary man? That was the answer! God who made us in his image and His likeness makes use of human beings in bringing salvation to the world. He took on human nature to redeem us. He created us to be dependent on one

another. Imagine how newborns would fare if they were left to fend for themselves as soon as they emerged from the womb. God loves us and places high value on us. The Lord clearly stated, “He who hears you, hears me he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me” (Luke 10:16).

Is it not sufficient to have God as our Father? Why does God bother entrusting such offices to men? Besides, the Bible says, “Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven” (Matthew 23:9).

God is sufficient! “Whom else have I in the heavens? None beside you delights me on earth. Though my flesh and my heart fail, God is the rock of my heart, my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25-26). This does not make human beings irrelevant. Though not indispensable, we also need human beings. God does not dismiss the role of parents, teachers, co-workers and friends nor did he abolish the use of the term “Father” for human beings. Obedience to parents is the Fourth commandments of God. “Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother” (Exodus 20:12). The Lord places high regard on the office of parents. “A wise son gives his father joy, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother” (Proverbs 10:1). He

commands us to give the honor due to God and not to anyone else. The papacy does not usurp God's place. The office of the pope is in service to God and to us, the sons and daughters of the King. The gift of the pope, our Father on earth, is to strengthen and guide our faith. "Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers (Luke 22:31-32). According to Catherine of Siena, the key role of the hierarchy epitomized by the Pope is the doorkeeper of the blood of God's only begotten Son. The Pope is not the king. He is the servant of the King. God is king.

Do you sometimes feel like a fatherless child or mad at God for taking your earthly father? Remember that God is your Father who never fails. He places for you on earth a father in faith and morals when he speaks ex cathedra. He is the *Santo Padre*.

May we conclude with this Song composed by Frederich W. Faber (1814-1863):

Faith of our Fathers holy Faith. We will be true to thee till death. Faith of our fathers, we will love. Both friend and foe in all our strife, And preach thee, too, as love knows how, By kindly words and virtuous life.
