

The Giving of Keys

Keys are important. We knew that from the very real and practical situations which arise when we haven't got them and without them we find ourselves in all sorts of difficulties. Where have I put them, I know I had them in my hand a few minutes ago but now they've disappeared and I can't for the life of me remember where they are! These are the ridiculous scenarios that are played out thousands of times in every household up and down the land and they are incredibly frustrating! But keys are not just the practical items that cause us so much hair pulling if we lose them. No, because of what keys do, we use the word to describe so much of our lives: the key to success, the key to understanding, the key to peace, the key to life and so on. It seems that every breakthrough whether it be in the political, scientific, philosophical or even religious world is predicated on the notion that at some point a metaphorical key is required so that a door is unlocked which opens a pathway onto a new landscape with a new horizon and the sum of our knowledge and understanding is thereby enhanced. Without the key we would have been stuck. So when in today's gospel Jesus tells Peter that he is going to give him the keys to the kingdom of heaven, something very important is being said.

First of all the giving of keys signifies trust. If you are given a key then surely you are being given something greater than the physical item. This is because you have been endowed with a responsibility of care, to ensure that the key is looked after and kept safe. Secondly it signifies understanding, that you know what this key represents and that you are able to comprehend the importance of what is being asked. Thirdly it signifies love; that with this key comes the opportunity to offer something awesome and inspiring, something which will change lives for the better. We know that this trust, this understanding, this love will be a great challenge to Peter. We know that he will stumble and fall and breakdown in tears because of what he has been asked to do, but we also know that Jesus doesn't ever regret his choices. He knew Peter, he knew his hard-headedness, hence his nickname *Cephas*. He knew his impetuosity – *Lord if it is you tell me to come to you across the water* – and he knew of his frailty – *before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times* — and so in one sense this fragility is accepted by Jesus as part of Peter's nature. But Jesus also knew of Peter's enormous heart, his love, his generosity and more than anything else he knew of his faith – *you are the Christ the Son of the living God*. The key given to him was the key that allowed Peter to explore that faith in the direst of circumstances and to come through that test and remain true to the message of the kingdom, a message of love for the poor, of comfort to those who mourn and of a gentleness of heart. It is a message of a hunger for justice and of a thirst for peace, and so it is for us. We too have been given the key to use to unlock this message and to delve in to the treasure which it opens for us and offer it to the world.

Peter came to understand this, and ultimately wrote it down summing up his feelings with the words:

You did not see him, yet you love him and still without seeing him ... you are sure of the end to which your faith looks forward, that is, the salvation of your souls.

Let us pray for the grace of trust, understanding and love as we turn the key that opens up the kingdom.