

**Fr. Drummond's Homily**  
**for 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time,**  
**23 August 2020**

“Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam, et portae inferi non praevallebunt adversus eam.”

Matthew 16: 18, here quoted from the Latin Vulgate, and its following verse are something every Roman Catholic should know by heart. For Matthew 16: 18-19 is the Scriptural foundation – the very words of Jesus Christ – that establishes the Petrine Office and its powers of loosening and binding. This is the very moment when Simon becomes Peter and the Mission of the Church is thrust upon him.

I opened with the Latin Vulgate of Matthew 16:18. Although the Gospel was originally written in Greek, for Catholics the Latin Vulgate is the authoritative text. Sadly, the first three words of the verse are almost always rendered into English as “You are Peter...” This mistranslation mitigates the full power and import of what Jesus is saying, and should more accurately be translated as “You are Rock...” What follows then is much more clear as Jesus goes on “and upon *this Rock* I will build my Church.” It thus reads as if Jesus speaks the first three words to Simon and then the follow up to the other Apostles and Disciples who are gathered around indicating the man He has just renamed Rock.

Rock is an image that is widely used in the Psalms. It is an image of strength and security and endurance. The term can even refer to God Himself because of these qualities: “The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer. My God is my rock in Whom I take refuge” Psalm 18:2. So this is a very powerful name embodying so many of the characteristics that Simon seems to lack. And the reason for that is so that the Power of God may shine all the more brightly through Simon who is now Rock.

The renaming of Simon all too often overshadows what else is going on here, namely that Christ is founding *His Church*. When some of our separated brethren speak of having a “Bible-based Church,” they are missing the boat. Our Lord spoke these words long before they were written down. Even the Epistles – so many of which are addressed to the Church – predate the Gospels. The

authentic Church is not Bible-based but Christ-based. Indeed, we should note that Jesus does not speak of *the* Church but of *His* Church.

The following line, verse 19, is equally important (but needs to be read in light of its preceding line) – “Et tibi dabo clavis regni caelorum. Et quodcumque ligaveris super terram, erit ligatum et in caelis, et quodcumque solveris super terram, erit solutum et in caelis.” It is in this second line that Jesus is making clear that this is an “office” or “function” that He is entrusting to Simon. In giving him the keys of heaven Jesus is making him his steward or chancellor – or as we more aptly say, his *vicar*. The keys of a kingdom were kept not by the King but by his highest and most trusted officer. This imagery would have been readily understood by the people of Jesus' time. The binding and loosening that follows is the authority and power of the person holding the keys. The keys were given to Peter *personally*, our Lord uses the singular “tibi” to you rather than the plural “vobis.” Later in Matthew 18:18 Jesus will use the plural “vobis” to you as He *secondarily* gives the power of binding and loosening to the other Apostles.

The loosening and binding refers, of course, to sin. The Church, first through the Office of Peter, then as duly delegated to other priests, has the power to forgive sins. But also the *discretion* of when *not* to forgive sins. This aspect is often overlooked as it goes to the heart of the reality of sin and sin's power to separate us from God. We are not willy-nilly forgiven our sins in the Confessional – we have to be *contrite*, we have to be sorry for our sins and we have to resolve to put sin behind us. When the conditions in our hearts are right, Christ *through* His Church forgives us our sins. After the Eucharist – His very Body and Blood – Christ's greatest gift to us is the Sacrament of Reconciliation in which the loosening and binding takes place.

I was baptized, instructed and initially confirmed in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany. (In German we actually did not use the word Lutheran but only Evangelical). But later in my life, reading this passage from Matthew I began to rethink much of what I was taught. And that led me to go on to become Catholic, and then later to become a priest. Such is the power of Sacred Scripture when we read it with hearts open to the Holy Spirit.