

On a Monday morning a few weeks ago I went to the local ACE Hardware store on 24<sup>th</sup> Street. I was dressed casually—khaki-colored slacks and a red polo short-sleeved shirt. Walking into the store I passed a lady standing at the display of key blanks. Seeing me pass, she said: “Sir. Could you make a key for me?” I realized that she had mistaken me for a store employee, who also wear red shirts with khaki slacks. Turning to her I said, “I’m sorry. I can’t help you with the key you’re looking for. While I have the power of the keys, I will get someone who can help your particular key.”

Keys play an important part of our life. Keys open or start things as well as close and safeguard things. Keys today come in many forms; traditional metal engraved objects: electronic-controlled pads accessed by a numerical or other code: locks activated by a fingerprint or the iris of an eye read electronically.

Keys are an ancient symbol of power and authority. Until a couple of centuries ago, in cities and towns protected by walls for defense purposes, daily life and security depended on the “keeper of the keys”—the person who locked and unlocked the city gates at dawn and at night.

Keys are a dominant symbol in today’s readings. In the first reading from Isaiah we hear that a corrupt political leader, Shebna, will be removed from office. Eliakim will replace him. As a symbol of his office, Eliakim will receive a ceremonial key draped over his shoulder, signifying his royal authority. In the Gospel story, Jesus confers on Peter the “keys to the kingdom of heaven” symbolizing the authority Peter is to have over the community of believers.

In entrusting Peter with the “keys to the kingdom” Jesus acknowledges the key of divine grace God has bestowed on Peter as he publicly proclaims for the first time what is the fundamental faith of the Church regarding the person of Jesus: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16). This key of grace has opened for Peter the door of faith. In acknowledging God’s selection of Peter, Jesus in turn, entrusts a further

responsibility to the “power of the key” Peter has received. From this point on, it will be Peter’s particular responsibility to be the “keeper of the keys”, safeguarding the truth about Jesus-- his words, his work, and passing on that same faith whole and undistorted. Traditionally, as Catholics we have looked principally to this passage as the establishment of the Petrine office in the Church, the papacy. Down through the Church’s journey through history to today, the principal ministry of the successor of Peter, the pope, has been to be the “keeper of the keys” to safeguard the “deposit of faith”—the Scriptures, and Sacred Tradition (Scripture’s living application in the Sacraments and in the teaching of the Popes and Bishops as successors to Peter and the other Apostles). We are the recipients of this legacy, today entrusted to Pope Francis and the bishops in union with him.

While Peter and his role as “keeper of the keys” are a focus of today’s Mass, these readings also concern us. Like Peter, we too, have experienced the grace of God opening us into a personal relationship with Jesus confessing him as “Lord and God.” Like Peter, too, we are given the “power of the keys” in union with the faith of the Church to foster the growth of the faith in our lives, and, as Pope Francis reminds us so often today, to be evangelists, people who are living “keys” opening the door to faith for others.

What about us? What is each of us doing with the key of faith entrusted to our stewardship? This fall our parish is again offering the twelve week series, ALPHA. ALPHA is a wonderful way to “touch base” with the fundamentals of our faith so we can exercise well our stewardship as “keeper of the keys” in our personal, family, parish and community life. MAN-UP, our monthly men’s spiritual growth meeting, is a standing invitation for all the men of our parish to grow in the faith. The CHRIST OUR LIFE CONFERENCE the weekend of September 20<sup>th</sup> in Des Moines is another opportunity for us. TEAMS OF OUR LADY, CHRISTIAN FAMILY MOVEMENT, and DATE NITE groups in the parish are small group opportunities for married persons to come together with one another and unlock family faith growth. These are a few examples. Check the Bulletin and parish web-site for other opportunities.

“Sir/Madame, could you help me find a key to help me know Jesus?” Hopefully, we can all say, “Yes. I have the key. Let me help you.”

