

Peter Rocks!

Isaiah 51¹⁻⁶; Psalm 138; Romans 12¹⁻⁸; Matthew 16¹³⁻²⁰

*On this rock I will build my Church.
(Matthew 16¹⁸)*

One of the great moments in life was to stand before the tomb of Peter, under St Peter's Basilica in Rome. We had to elbow our way through the crowd praying at the tomb of Pope John-Paul II (who had not, at that point, been declared a Saint) and stood, just the two of us, facing the stone on which was scratched *PETRUS EST* (Peter is here)! We were within touching distance of the remains of someone who touched Jesus.

The Gospel reading for today reminds us of one of the great moments in the New Testament (so important that Matthew, Mark and Luke all include it).

- ✦ People had become aware that Jesus was special, but they had no clear idea just who he was. Jesus then asks the question, **Who do people say the Son of Man is?** A safe question - it involves passing on what other people think - and it was clear that the people had a general notion that he was a prophet.
- ✦ Jesus then asks the more direct question to his disciples, **Who do you say that I am?** - a more difficult question because it is about what an individual thinks or believes! Peter jumps in with for the first time to declare, **Your are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!** This is a turning point for the disciples and in the Gospel - after this we begin to think about Jesus moving towards Jerusalem and to death and then resurrection.
- ✦ Peter is affirmed - **flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven!** That is some authority for this statement!
- ✦ **You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the gates of Hades** (literally the gates of death) **will not prevail against it.**

What is clear from this is that Peter's character is not rock-like! He very soon goes on to show how unreliable he is. Yet, he has the courage to confess Christ and the tenacity to overcome his own failings to be the one around whom the Church is built.

Surely, here is an encouragement to us too! Who were are - failings as well as strengths - can be used by God!

Most of us, when we look at who we are, take note of the things we fail at and so we would rather attempt to hide than take risks. But it is more important to take note - as Peter managed to do - that it is our confession of Christ that wipes out our failings. This is our inspiration and motivation to be and to do what God calls us to be.

God knows our weaknesses and is able to use us because of them.

- ✦ **I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**

This is exciting stuff. This *Power of Keys* allows us to be active in God's work. This isn't Peter - and us - saying something and waiting for it to be verified by heaven in the future, but making decisions that heaven will accept.

Our Roman Catholic friends understand this to be a power restricted to Popes, Bishops and Priests - something conferred by ordination. Our understanding is that this is something that belongs to all who confess Christ!

What do you dare to bind? What do you dare to loose? This isn't some rarified theology - it is practical and no use if it isn't used! People, situations, problems - in our prayers they are held or let go!

We encounter Jesus; we confess Jesus as the messiah - that makes us Christian.

We take the risk of doing heavens' work - that makes us Christlike.