

Homily, XXI Sunday in Ordinary Time

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In the first reading we see how God removes one Sobná from his office as a high official of the court of Jerusalem for abuse of power, and puts another royal steward in his stead: Eliaquin, "my servant." This expression means that Eliaquin is a person who with his heart and conduct follows the law of the Lord and is consecrated to the service of God.

The transfer of this power is given through the investiture of the tunic and the band, as when Elijah covers Elisha with his mantle calling him to his prophetic ministry (1 Kgs 19:19). The keys are the symbol of power and authority, and for this reason they are not placed in the hand of the person but on his shoulder (Is 9: 5: "power rests on his shoulders"). The power of the keys consisted not only in the supervision and administration of the things of the court, but also in the power of deciding who could enter the service of the king: "when he opens, no one will be able to close;" (Is 22:22). It was a charge linked to the same king.

Today's Gospel (Mt 16: 13-20) has aroused many controversies at the exegetical and theological level in the dialogue with non-Catholic churches around the figure of the Pope and his authority. Certainly the drafting problem of the text is complex. We will limit ourselves to exposing its structure and theological ideas most relevant to our faith in light of the context of the same Gospel of Matthew.

First, there is a dialogue between Jesus and the disciples about their identity: "Who do the people say that the Son of Man is? ... And who are you? Who am I?" (Verses 13-15) and then a dialogue directly with Peter who speaks on behalf of all: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (verses 16-19).

Jesus then addresses Peter directly from three different perspectives.

(A) He directs a beatitude (verse 17): "Blessed are you, Simon the Son of John ... Peter is called blessed, not by his own merits but because God has given Peter the gift of recognizing Jesus as Messiah and Son of God.

(B) Jesus makes Peter a promise about his destiny: he will be the foundation and foundation of the building up of the messianic community that has already begun to gather around Jesus. This community, like the Messiah, will not succumb to death: "the power of death can not be against it" (v. 18). Peter will be the foundation stone for this new Israel. The name change confirms the promise. Peter's faith will be the firm and solid stone upon which the community of Jesus will be built over and over throughout history.

(C) Jesus announces to Peter his future mission symbolized in the keys, which indicate authority and responsibility (cf. Is 22:22; Rev 3: 7). Through the life and mission of the ecclesial community the kingdom of God will be announced and celebrated in history. And the keys of this community are given to Peter. He will have the authority to "bind" and "untie", that is, he will have the authority to interpret with authority the will of God and to adapt it to the new situations of the community.

Indeed, in the Gospel of Matthew, accepting and obeying the will of God is the condition to enter the kingdom (Mt 7,21). The service of Peter is a service to the word of Jesus in which the will of the Father is expressed. Peter will also always live with a lucid conscience that "the disciple is no more than his master, nor the servant more than his master" (Mt 10,24). His mission and authority is fundamental in the church, but his authority will always be marked by humble service in the image of the Son of Man, who "came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for all" (Matt. 20,28).

Peter, whose faith will be the foundation stone of the Church of Jesus, receives the task of being "steward" and "supervisor" (first reading) of this messianic community, which as a new people of God has the mission to announce the kingdom and fight so that men may be free from the slavery of evil and death. Even today Jesus asks you the same question he asked his disciples. Will your response be influenced by your social environment, or moved by the Holy Spirit will you respond to it like St. Peter?