



Unlocked and Set Free

Homily for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, A
July 26/27, 2017 (5:00 p.m., 8:00 a.m., 12 Noon – Parish Picnic)

1. In 2015 I had the privilege of traveling with the choir to Rome and Sicily
 - we took an overnight ferry from Naples to Taormina in Sicily and spent a long day on the bus touring and heading to our hotel
 - when we got to the hotel we spent a little time in the lobby and then I announced that I was going to take a shower before dinner
 - I arrived in my room and the TV wasn't working so I called the maintenance department and they promised to send someone up
 - so I went into the tiny bathroom, made sure the door was shut behind me and proceeded to take a relaxing and refreshing shower
 - when I finished I went to go back into the room, and the bathroom door was locked from the inside out – they had put the handle on the wrong side of the door
 - my relaxing shower turned into a sweaty and steamy nightmare!
 - I'm thinking I can't get out of here. What if no one finds me? Will I have to sleep on the bathroom floor? I have nothing but a towel here!
 - I became panicked, pounded on the bathroom door, the bathroom wall and pulled an emergency line sending a buzzer into the hallway outside my room
 - minutes went by, no response, no sound beyond the wall that separated me from bondage to freedom – is there anybody out there?
 - about 20 minutes passed and someone shouted, "Do you need some help? Is everything OK?"
 - "No, everything isn't okay. I'm locked in the bathroom. Send someone to help me."
 - it turns out it was Lou Virost, one of our parishioners, who worked with the hotel staff to get the door unlocked
 - I was relieved, calmed down, and set free

2. A Key made all the difference between being locked out or set free
 - and so when Jesus in Matthew's Gospel today gives to Peter the keys to the kingdom, it is not a minor thing
 - The area of Caesarea Philippi where this scene takes place was a pagan territory
 - it is located in what is the modern day, "Golan Heights" and it was located next to a spring
 - there was a pagan temple there and a rocky hill in which shrines and memorials were carved for worship of the god Pan

- it is here that Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?”
- distinguishing himself from the pagan gods worshipped in this region, Jesus wants to know if the disciples really know his identity as the Messiah, the son of the living God
- it is Peter who answers correctly
- Significant is the fact that Jesus looks at the rocky hill and then to Peter and says to him, you are the rock and upon this rock, the rock of the living and true God, I will build my church
- and then he says, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

3. What is the significance of a Key?

- if you’ve been locked out, or locked in, or locked away – you know the tremendous value of a key (as I did in Sicily in 2015)
- a key is something that sets you free, opens doors and possibilities, frees us from things that hold us bound, unlocks hope and future and gives new freedom

4. For us, as the Catholic Church, we’ve been given 7 keys – we call them sacraments

- each of them opens us up to a deeper relationship with God
- Baptism – frees us from original sin, names and declares us as God’s own
- Eucharist – feeds us with living bread for our journeys, so that we might not hunger or thirst but be fed with eternal life
- Reconciliation – lifts us from the burden of sin, bestows God’s mercy, compassion and forgiveness, gives us freedom from bondage to our wrongs, sets us on a new path
- Marriage, Holy Orders, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick all are sacraments which lead us to a new healing, a new calling, a renewed purpose
- all – keys which open us up to a deeper presence of our God

5. This place – Santa’s Hide-a-Way Hollow is a key which unlocks the joy and the magical spirit of Christmas

- and today, we break ground on a place for families to pray, to thank God for today, and to commend our loved ones – to God’s providential care

6. Our personal and communal relationship with the Lord is the key to a good life, a hopeful future and the promise of eternity

- it opens us to see God everywhere and to believe that God unlocks our humanity to become more divine, more like our Creator
- our world today needs this key; it needs to believe in hope, to deepen its trust in a Savior who came that might live; who laid down his life for us and unlocked for us the gates of heaven
- Peter was the first to be given a key; but you and I have been given one as well
- FAITH is that key – use it wisely and it will unlock an amazing future and possibilities beyond imagining for you, for your loved ones, and for our world