

21st Sunday of Ordinary Time “The Key to a Deeper Relationship with God”

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Both our first reading and our Gospel reading play with the metaphor of locks and keys. In our first reading, the Lord gave Eliakim the key to the House of David. In the Gospel reading Peter received the keys to the Kingdom of God. On the one hand, this is all very good news. Human beings can be entrusted with God’s keys. Heaven’s door doesn’t have to be locked to us. On the flip side, heaven does not seem to have an open-door policy either. You need someone with a key to get in. The good news though is Jesus gave Peter the keys to heaven. For anyone who knows about Saint Peter, this should give us all great hope, and underscores how important a role the Apostolic Church has regarding our salvation.

I do wonder, however, if the analogy of “locks and keys” can be lost on the younger generation a bit. In fact, I think there could very well be a day in a decade or so when kids will have to be told what a key looks like as nowadays keys are being slowly replaced by number pads, automatic door openers and such. Even a lot of cars out there just have a start button these days. And so, perhaps a more modern analogy to all this could be taken from our smart phones, the very devices that are replacing keys for many people. What can smart phones tell us about what opening our heart to Jesus looks like?

As I shared in a recent NW Catholic article, every smart phone has many apps that you can open or shut at any time, some require a code, and some require a thumb print or face scan. If we go with that analogy, when it comes to unlocking our hearts to Jesus, I think the temptation we have is to treat Jesus; and perhaps faith in general, like an app on our phone that we can open and close, or even lock whenever we want. Perhaps we open that “Jesus App” several times a day or perhaps once or twice a month or when Sunday comes around. When we are at work, school, or hanging out with our friends, how often are we tempted to keep the “Jesus App” closed? Of course, the same can be said regarding the other apps in our souls, like our family app, sports app, entertainment app, and our politics app. As the election season heats up this coming year, take notice how often people talk about their politics with their Jesus application closed.

My point here is this: when Jesus offers us salvation through his passion, death, and resurrection, he sincerely is not looking to become just another app on our phone. Jesus wants to be the operating system itself by which all the other applications in our life rest. Do you get what I am trying to say here? Jesus is not to be treated like another application our soul can just open and shut whenever we want. All the “apps” we access in our souls like family, school, work, sports and even politics ought to rest on the operating system of our faith in Jesus, who alone can offer us eternal life. Smart phones can’t offer us that. Politicians can’t offer us that. Only Jesus has the words of eternal life, and he has given heaven’s keys to Peter.

And so, I believe a good spiritual exercise this week could be to ask ourselves the question: do I treat Jesus like another app on my phone or is Jesus my operating system? If we answer correctly, we may just find out that we need to delete certain activities or behaviors that are not compatible with a relationship with Jesus for the wellbeing of our souls. In addition, I

think the challenge this week is to truly unlock our whole being to the Lord like Eliakim and Peter did: our successes, our failures, our strengths, our weaknesses, our worries, our fears, and even our dashed hopes. We should also consider what Pope Leo reminds us in *Delixit Te*, “Charity is not optional but a requirement of true worship”. I found that so very true in my life, that loving our neighbor is an important key to deeper love of God along with an enriched experience of God’s love for us. Next time you are feeling down, try to get involved more with serving the poor and isolated. You will get more out of it than you give. Indeed, with all that life throws at us from time to time, we are invited to courageously unlock our hearts completely to the Lord. This process begins with prayer and spending time as community to give God praise. The Holy Eucharist we celebrate, which is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord, is the key St. Peter points us to that unlocks a deeper love of God and neighbor.