

What thoughts or feelings come to mind when you hear the word “authority”? I think in our modern society in 2017, just uttering the word “authority” conjures up all kinds of emotions and attitudes, most negative probably. But when you *really* think about it and reflect on the meaning and nature of authority, you come to realize that *without* authority, we would live in a *totally* chaotic, lawless, confusing, uneducated, and probably violent world—more so than we could ever imagine. I mean could you imagine a world *without* the *authority* of parents, grandparents, teachers, law enforcement, legislators, doctors, scientists, engineers, architects, historians, etc.? It would be a pretty dark and disordered world where many would be lost in ignorance and confusion.

While the modern mind might react harshly to the word “authority,” the truth of the matter is that if we’re honest with ourselves, we would readily affirm that as human beings, we live our daily lives by authority—meaning that we live our lives based on the authority of others. And if we really want to be honest and politically incorrect, we might even go so far as to declare that *authority is actually a gift from*

God that is meant to help us, guide us, lead us, protect us, heal us, and provide us with clarity and an enlightened understanding. Authority is intended by its very nature to provide for our well-being, our safety, prosperity, and success. So I think it's reasonable to say that authority is essentially good and that we need authority in order to live and flourish in this world. Now obviously, like any good thing, authority can be abused and used for evil purposes. So authority is meant to be exercised with humility, in accordance with reason and truth, and for the sake of virtue, love, and the common good.

In today's incredibly rich Gospel, our Lord Jesus speaks primarily about authority. In speaking *directly* to St. Peter, the hand-picked leader of the 12 Apostles, Jesus tells him, "And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build *my church*, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give *you the keys to the kingdom of heaven*. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Brothers and sisters, if this passage from today's Gospel isn't clear, incontrovertible evidence that our Lord Jesus Christ established a

universal Church—the Catholic Church—on St. Peter to continue our Lord’s mission of proclaiming the Gospel of salvation to all humanity until the end of time, then I don’t know what is. And mind you, *this is only one piece of an overwhelming mountain of evidence* that clearly indicates that the Son of God established *one* Church, the Catholic Church, to teach and sanctify in His name. In recognizing this reality, we realize that Christ is absolutely inseparable from His Catholic Church.

Christ certainly established this one Church *upon Peter*, the leader of the 12 Apostles, and explicitly confers upon Peter *divine authority* to teach, govern, and sanctify in the name of Christ. And so this is clearly one major piece of evidence of what’s called the Primacy of Peter, also known as the “Petrine Ministry” or the Primacy of the Papacy.

But let’s go back to Jesus’ words to Peter: “I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Alright, what’s up with these “keys” and what’s all this “binding and loosing” about?

Well first, in the ancient world and certainly in 1st century Roman Palestine, the handing on of keys to someone was a unique and symbolic act of conferring power and authority on someone. In the ancient world, a key was understood to represent authority, especially teaching authority. In fact, in today's first reading from the Book of Isaiah, we hear a similar reference to keys, when the Lord says he will basically give the key of the House of David to Eliakim, who would replace Shebna as the "master of the palace" for the Davidic monarchy.

So by Jesus giving the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to St. Peter, our Savior is conferring unique *Divine authority* upon this fisherman from Galilee to lead His Universal Church and to teach, govern, and sanctify in Christ's name. Peter was thus preeminent among the 12 Apostles and was given a unique mission to guard the authentic teachings of Christ, serve as a focal point of unity, and be a Shepherd for the Apostles and the entire Church.

Moreover, the phrase "binding and loosing" was a similar expression denoting authority that was well-known in rabbinic and Jewish literature. "Binding and loosing" was a Jewish metaphor that

held several important meanings: first, it meant the giving of authoritative teaching and the ability to render binding decisions; second, it denotes the authority to include or exclude members of a religious community—in other words, the ability to lift or impose the ban of excommunication; and lastly, this expression referred to the forgiveness of sins, and more specifically the power to absolve sins.

So given Jesus' declaration to St. Peter, Peter is given the authority to govern the Church, to forgive sins, and to make doctrinal as well as disciplinary pronouncements, all in the name of Christ for the sake of the Gospel. Lastly, later in Matthew's Gospel Christ also gives the power of binding and loosing to the other 11 Apostles, which signifies that the other Apostles share with Peter this authority to teach, govern, and sanctify in His name, although Peter and his successors, the Popes, possess it in a unique and preeminent manner.

So this official, joint teaching authority comprised of the Pope *and* the universal college of bishops, who are the successors to the Apostles, is known as the Magisterium. The Magisterium is the official teaching authority of Christ's Church. The sacred duty of the Magisterium is to

safeguard the teachings of Christ and to proclaim the Gospel with love and mercy to all people at all times. Through the Magisterial authority of the Church it is truly our Lord Jesus Who teaches, sanctifies, and governs us—all for the sake of our eternal salvation. When the Magisterium teaches *definitively and authoritatively on matters of faith and morals*, we as disciples of Christ's one Church should, out of *humble* obedience, accept such teachings faithfully and lovingly as coming from Christ Himself.

The Magisterium of Christ's Church is not designed to oppress, control, or destroy us as some may wrongfully judge. But rather the Magisterial authority of the Church is a great gift from God that's designed to help us, teach us, heal us, sanctify us, liberate us, and lead us closer to Christ. I cannot emphasize this enough: the Magisterial authority of the Church is a manifestation of God's infinite goodness and His boundless mercy and love for you and me. So then the question is, if God is infinite love, mercy, and goodness, why wouldn't He establish an official teaching authority like the Magisterium to help us, enlighten us, guide us, and heal us in the midst of this fallen and broken world?

As we prepare to encounter Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, let's thank Him for the great gift of His Church and Her Magisterium and ask Him for the grace to grow in humility and obedience, so that through the Magisterial authority of His Church, we might grow closer to Him and become the saints He's calling all of us to be.