

Reflections on the Gospel

TREASURED KNOWLEDGE

Jesus questions his disciples about popular perceptions of who he is. Their report shows that people cast him in familiar but totally inadequate roles. The reality requires a leap in imagination and faith achieved in Simon Peter's response: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God'. Beyond being Messiah of Israel, Jesus is God's Son in a unique way.

Peter has conferred a title upon Jesus. Now Jesus confers a blessing and three roles upon him.

He is 'blessed', not because he is virtuous, but because God has revealed to him a knowledge that unaided human understanding could never achieve. Everything the Church has to say flows from this God-given knowledge of Jesus. This is the inexhaustible treasure that it holds in trust for the world.

Simon's first role is indicated by his name: 'Peter' (= 'Rock'). He is 'rock', again not because of his personal qualities, but because of his knowledge of Jesus. Built on this 'rock', the Church will be a community of life, against which the powers of death ('gates of the underworld') will not prevail.

The gift of keys, a biblical image (see the First Reading) signifies delegated authority (from Jesus) in the household of God (the Church).

The final role, 'binding and loosing', refers to the power to interpret and apply Jesus' authoritative teaching to new situations. In this way the Church, as both expression and foretaste of God's reign ('Kingdom of Heaven') on earth, is equipped to discern God's will in the changing circumstances that will confront its passage down the ages.

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