

# Archbishop Smith: No Keyless Entry

I have no idea how it works, but I am glad it does. Does anyone know how we came up with the word “fob”? I have one of these things, which gives me keyless access to my vehicle. “Fobs” grant electronic entry to offices and buildings, too. Access points still need to be unlocked, of course, but an actual key is becoming less necessary than it has been.

The Gospel passage from last Sunday (Matthew 16:13-20) makes clear that there is no “keyless entry” to the kingdom of heaven. I fear that sometimes we think there is, in the sense that the only thing necessary to enter heaven is to be nice to people. I once heard a priest put it this way: “That might qualify you for membership in the humane society, but not the kingdom of God.”

There is a necessary key, and it is Jesus Christ. The Christian proclamation is clear. Only the grace of the Lord’s paschal mystery – his death and resurrection – opens the gates of heaven to sinful humanity. That grace is communicated by the gift of the Holy Spirit, which normally reaches us in the sacraments of the Church.

In St. Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus gives to Simon Peter “the keys to the kingdom of heaven.” Since Jesus himself is the key, this bestowal of “keys” is an act of entrustment to Simon Peter (and his successors – the Popes), thus rendering him a steward of the Lord’s grace of entry. This stewardship is the essence of “the power to bind and loose,” given by the Lord to Simon Peter, as well as to the Apostles (and their successors – the Bishops; cf. John 19: 22-23). This power has three principal aspects: magisterial, so that believers can know with confidence that the teaching they receive from ecclesial authority is an authentic and faithful handing on of the doctrine received from the Lord and his Apostles; juridical, by which the parameters of Christian life and membership in the Church are delineated; and sacramental, rendering the holders of sacred office instruments of God’s mercy and forgiveness in the sacraments, especially that of Penance.

Personally, I have always found this “handing on of the keys” enormously consoling. As a believer who clings by faith to Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, I need to know that the doctrine informing my act of faith is true. As one who cherishes participation in the life and mission of Christ’s Body, the Church, I want to understand clearly the patterns of thought and behaviour expected of a Christian, and therefore also those that would place me outside of ecclesial communion. As a sinner, I need the assurance that the words of absolution spoken to me by the priest in the sacrament of Penance truly do impart to me the mercy and forgiveness of God. None of these needs is answered by the presumption of “keyless entry.” That is simply tantamount to self-reliance, which human weakness confirms to be no assurance at all.

As we know, the current Successor to Saint Peter, the present “holder of the keys” for the universal Church, is Pope Francis. It is an enormous responsibility. Let’s be sure to pray daily for the Holy Father and his exercise of the Petrine ministry.