

“It’s a package deal.” (Homily)

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August 27, 2017 – Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time; (Lectionary: 121; MT 16:13-20)

Several years ago, I volunteered regularly at a soup kitchen. One of the patrons there was an older Lebanese man who had fled his native land during a deadly civil war. He was a friendly man, and we would chat towards the end of lunch as things slowed down a bit. One day, as I paid my respects to him, he asked if he could have some more chicken. It was very good, he said—reminded him of home—and it had been a while, a long while, since he had tasted *good* chicken.

“Sure,” I said, “but I have to follow the rules of the kitchen.”

“Of course,” he said, “and what would they be?”

“Well, sir,” I said, “the main rule is this: I can serve you again, but it must be a complete meal, just as the chef prepares it.”

“Ah!” he said, in a thick Lebanese accent. “I get it! It’s a package deal!”

“Yes sir,” said I, “A package deal it is, indeed.”

“I’ll take it!” he said with a smile, and I got him another plate.

Now, I’ve told you this story because you may have missed the package deal in today’s Gospel, and I don’t want you to overlook it. Who Jesus is, and what the Church does, and how we get to heaven is “a package deal.” And here it is:

- Jesus is God, and only God can forgive sins.
- Jesus (God) has invested the Church with this power.
- Forgiveness is the key to heaven.

From the mouth of Jesus to your ears!

Now, there are those, like my good Lebanese friend, who may not want the whole package. Some folks just don’t see forgiveness as the key to heaven. They just don’t see sinning as that important in the overall scheme of things. But Jesus does. So, who do they say Jesus is? John the Baptist? Elijah? Clearly, not God, for they don’t believe him.

Others may want forgiveness, but not through the Church. They just don’t see the Church as that important in the overall scheme of things. But Jesus does. So, who do they say Jesus is? Jeremiah, or one of the prophets? Clearly, not God, for again, they don’t believe him.

When was the last time a priest heard your confession? Has it been a long time? Is it because you don’t see forgiveness as the key to heaven? Is it because you don’t believe the Church has been entrusted with this key?

Who do YOU say Jesus is?

Gospel: Matthew 16:13-20

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples,

"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter said in reply,

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus said to him in reply,

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.

For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.

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."

Then he strictly ordered his disciples

to tell no one that he was the Christ.