February 22nd: Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter, Apostle

Gospel text (*Mt* 16:13-19): When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi 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.”

“And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church”

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Today, we celebrate the Chair of St. Peter. Since the 4th century, the Church wants to emphasize with this celebration the fact that —as a gift from Jesus Christ to us— the edifice of his Church stands upon the Prince of the Apostles, who enjoys a peculiar divine help to fulfill that mission. This is how the Lord said it at Caesarea Philippi: “I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church” (Mt 16:18). Indeed, “from the whole world Peter alone is chosen to take the lead in calling all nations, to be the head of all the Apostles and of all the Fathers of the Church” (St. Leo the Great).

From its very beginning, the Church has benefited from this Petrine Ministry so that St. Peter and his related successors, have presided over charity, have been a source of unity and, most especially, have had the mission to confirm their brothers in the truth.

Once He resurrected, Jesus confirmed this mission to Simon Peter. He, who deeply repented and had already cried over his triple denial before Jesus, makes now a triple statement of love: “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you” (Jn 21:17). Then, the Apostle saw with consolation how Jesus Christ did not turn away from him and, for three times, confirmed him in the ministry that had previously been announced to him: "Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:16-17).

This authority is not conferred to Simon because of his own merits, nor his declaration of faith in Caesarea: “For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father” (Mt 16:17). Indeed, this is an authority granted with the supreme power to serve; this is why the Roman Pontiff, when signing his writings, does so with the honorific title of Servus servorum Dei (Servant of the servants of God).

It is, therefore, a power to serve the cause of the unity based upon truth. We undertake to pray for the successor of St. Peter, to intently listen to his words and to be grateful to God for this gift.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “We are with the Pope, because being with him, one is with God” (Saint Thomas More)

- “Peter, for all time, must be the custodian of communion with Christ. Peter's responsibility is to guarantee communion with Christ with the charity of Christ, leading to the realization of this charity in daily life.” (Benedict XVI)

- “When St. Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus declared to him that this revelation did not come "from flesh and blood", but from ‘my Father who is in heaven’ (Mt 16:17). Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by Him (...)” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 153)