

February 22: Chair of St. Peter, apostle

Gospel text (Mt 16,13-19): When Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi, He asked his disciples, «Who do people say the Son of man is?». They said, «For some of them you are John the Baptist, for others Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets». Jesus asked them, «But you, who do you say I am?». Peter answered, «You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God».

Jesus replied, «It is well for you, Simon Barjona, for it is not flesh or blood that has revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. And now I say to you: You are Peter (or Rock) and on this rock I will build my Church; and never will the powers of death overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what you unbind on earth shall be unbound in heaven».

«I say to you: You are Peter (or Rock) and on 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: «You are Peter (or Rock) and on 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 of this stony 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). Henceforth, the Apostle will be soothed when realizing Jesus Christ does not deny him and, for three times, He confirms him in the ministry he had been announced before: «Tend my sheep» (Jn 21:16-17).

This authority is not conferred because of his own merits, as, Simon's declaration of faith, at Caesarea, was not either: «for it is not flesh or blood that has revealed this to you but my Father in heaven!» (Mt 16:17). Yes, this is an authority granted with the supreme power to serve. This is why the Roman Pontiff, when signing his writings, he does it with the honorific title of: Servus servorum Dei.

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.