

Catholic Church of the Beatitudes  
Santa Barbara, CA

**The Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, Apostles, Cycle A – June 29, 2014**

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Reflections on Acts 12: 1-11; 2 Tim 4:6-8; Matt 16:13-19

**T**oday we hear faith stories of two inspiring models in the early church, Saint Peter and Saint Paul—both Apostles and both martyrs.

I love Peter's solidness in being the first to grasp the fullness of the reality of Jesus, saying: "You are the Christ, the Messiah." Jesus blesses him for his insight and intuition, for listening not only to his head, but also to what his heart was telling him.

We all know Paul's story of how he came to be a follower of Jesus, through his blinding experience on the road to Damascus. In his steadfastness and zeal he crisscrossed the Mediterranean three times, covering some 10,000 miles on foot and traveling many more by sea.

These two giants had strong differences about such things as circumcision, observing the Jewish dietary laws, and even whether Christian/Gentiles and Christian/Jews should eat at the same table. Yes, the dualism of who is in and who is out was alive and well then also. Despite these disagreements, the two were united in their faith in Jesus the Christ.

The diversity of opinions held by these two men reminds me of the words of our Francis when he spoke during his first year as Pope. He pointed out the church's mistake of focusing on small-minded values rather than the things that would make our hearts burn, as happened on the road to Emmaus. He used the wonderful analogy of the church being in need of healing. It made him think of a field hospital after a battle: "It's pointless," he said, "to ask a seriously injured patient whether his

cholesterol or blood sugar levels are high! It's his *wounds* that need to be healed."

For the past two months I have been part of a book discussion group at Trinity Episcopal Church. It has been such an amazing experience! We are reading: *She Who Changes: Re-Imaging the Divine in the World*, by Carol Christ, who has been a leading writer in women's spirituality and feminist theology movements for many years. She is also a great believer in process philosophy, so this book was written from that vantage point. To help capture just a bit of how process philosophy works, her book states: "All life is in process, changing and developing, growing and dying, and even the divine power participates in changing life."

Her chapter topics have brought forth thoughtful discussions and reflections. It seems synchronistic that just two weeks ago our chapter spoke firmly about authority—male domination, and questioned how we interpret our sacred texts as if they were the *only* truth.

Ms. Christ holds that all spiritual texts, traditions, and persons at their best express a portion of the truth from a particular perspective. For me there was a profound tie-in with today's naming of Peter's leadership and the continued male leadership in the church throughout the years. What also came up for me is the great sadness that we don't hear many stories of women in the church and if we do, we don't often hear their names.

This week I read an article by Sr. Sandra Schneiders written several years ago. She is

Professor Emerita of New Testament Studies and Christian Spirituality at Santa Clara University. Her article “The Effects of Women’s Experience on Their Spirituality,” has some unsettling quotes: “Women’s experience of religious marginalization, exclusion and subordination has affected women’s ministry and their sense of themselves in relation to God.” She writes that women have been “virtually excluded from any participation in the shaping of the church’s internal and external policy.” Of course the point of these quotes is not news to us, nor are Christ’s words. They are simply an acknowledgment of the elephant in the living room.

I am speaking here not only about women but men as well. Ms. Christ writes that we all have been touched by what she calls “power over,” or *domination*. Her concern is the willingness of all of us to submit to religious, political, and military power systems that create a sense of being voiceless, specifically in the church about the issues of artificial birth control, divorce and remarriage, abortion, homosexuality and the ordination of women.

To connect this to the here-and-now, two days ago a working paper was released concerning the October 2015 Synod of Bishops, which will focus on the Family. Many of us, in great hopefulness, filled out the online questionnaire geared at getting not only input from Bishops but also to get the opinions of people in the pews. The issues in this poll are the same as Carol Christ’s, except for the addition of married priests. The draft sent to Bishops Thursday states that the Church must be merciful in their response, but reinforced the church teaching regarding indissolubility of marriage, the restriction of marriage to heterosexual couples and that partners must be open to having children.

It boggles my mind and probably yours that these issues have been with us for over 40 years. I risk bringing this up in today’s homily because I think it is important for us to ask

ourselves if we have been harmed spiritually by this “power over” mentality.

The flip side of what Carol Christ calls “power over” is “power with,” which deals with cooperation, partnership and mutuality.

The last part of today’s gospel tells Peter that he has the keys to open any and every door and that there will be no more barriers between heaven and earth.

Thursday I was with some Beatitudes people who were talking about the kindness and compassionate work that is being done for the poor through BLT, Bag Lunch Thursday, and helping women who are homeless and living in their cars.

This is an amazing community, doing such significant outreach. That kind of empathy, I believe, also qualifies as *keys*. We each have our own unique key that will make a difference in our broken world!

If there were a courier taking a letter to Pope Francis this afternoon, what would *you* want to say about the keys you hold?—the keys that could help to heal our church?

I still consider myself Catholic, though I realize I am on the fringe or margins of the Church. Richard Rohr, a man I honor and respect, says it is not rebellious or antisocial to live on the spiritual edge. It could be a prophetic position when done with respect and honor. He suggests that on the fringes we are free to hear the church’s core message in very new and creative ways. Maybe it is all in the perspective. We are free because we do not feel compelled to defend or protect the system when we see it misses the mark.

I believe that both Peter and Francis—indeed, all of us—are holders of keys: keys for the healing of our broken Church and world. Our keys enable what we do, what we say, and how we live our lives to make things better for our communities and ourselves.

Finally here is what fits, I believe, with the gospel reading of today: We are each, like Peter, solid rocks. And we each carry our own special keys, which will open many doors.