

Ordinations in the Holy Church of God
January, 18, 2020 – The Confession of St. Peter the Apostle
Sermon preached by the Reverend Matthew Johnson

We gather for Sacred Ordination on this Holy Day of The Confession of St. Peter. First of the Apostles, and the very prototype of ordained service.

In Christian Art and Iconography, when it comes to St Peter—as with all the Saints, certain symbols distinguish Peter’s image from others. Can you guess the most famous of these? Think for a second . . . Of course there is the symbol of the two overlapping keys. For, as Jesus tells Peter in today’s Holy Gospel—and to me this is really mind-blowing: “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.” (—Back to those keys in a minute.)

Let’s cut for a moment now, not to the sacred, but to secular culture. Where the only Ikon of St. Peter you’re likely to find will be there, not in gold leaf, but in a cartoon. I come across these occasionally, in *The New Yorker* and other magazines.

Picture a cartoon rendering of St. Peter standing there, at the Gates of Heaven. In his supposed role of admitting or barring hopeful prospects who arrive there. And notice, that the symbols that mark him out in the cartoon, are altogether different.

First of course, is the blessed Apostle—identifiable by his halo and long beard. Then there are the Gates of Heaven themselves—grand, imposing and, note this, often closed! Next, notice—and this is a bit strange—a sort of kiosk. Behind which Peter stands—clouds billowing all around. On top of this kiosk sits the Book of Life. Which Peter consults, before offering up some wry comment on one’s Eternal Destiny!

Nowadays, of course, it’s not The Book of Life, but The Laptop of Life that Peter consults.

At the Gates, with one very shifty, nervous-looking aspirant, St. Peter points to The Laptop and enquires, “Okay . . . give me your username and password, one more time.”

The face of another man just falls, when St. Peter looks up, a bit shocked, from The Laptop and tells him plainly, “It’s all there on Facebook!” Cat owners will empathize with an exasperated St. Peter addressing a feline at the Gate, “Make up your mind. Are you coming in, or not?”

Now, of course, none of this is biblical. — At all! — And yet . . .

And yet . . . this scenario at the Gates points us to a universal human theme. The theme of the Threshold. A point at which, we stand on the brink, in this case—of something momentous.

For, if anything, in this gathering, at this Holy Ordination, we stand at the Threshold, the Inception—of three priestly ministries.

When it comes to ordained ministry there could be no more fitting emissary, than Peter, in embodying the truths—including the difficult truths, of priestly apostolate. Actually, his name was Simon. Cephas (—Greek ‘Petros’, English ‘Peter’), is Jesus’ nickname for Simon—that is, his ‘callsign’. Cephas, means literally, “the rock” or “rocky”. A nickname which itself suggests, that with all his human failings, Peter had a substantial character.

Jesus saw something solid at his core. And Jesus speaks elsewhere—doesn’t he?—about building a house on a “foundation of solid rock”. Here, as he speaks about the Church that will continue his mission, Jesus points out that Peter is just that sort of rock. Solid. Foundational.

What does that tell us about Jesus own opinion, even esteem, of Peter? After all—you don’t entrust your ‘Keys’ to just anyone, do you?

Oh, and Jesus chose well . . .

When we look at Peter’s life, we see that substance demonstrated over and over. Oh yes, and a couple of oblivious moments to boot! There are so many examples of Peter’s strengths, including his Spirit-inspired confession here, of the Messiah. But I’m thinking now especially of his later career.

- Peter—standing at and crossing the threshold dividing clean and unclean, when God commands him respecting the unclean animals, “Get up Peter, Kill, and Eat.”
- Peter—standing at the threshold separating Jew and Gentile, when he crosses the doorstep of a Roman Centurion’s home, to share with a non-Jew and a foreigner, the hope that so animated all that Peter was living for.
- And later—as Sacred Tradition reliably attests; Peter—standing at the threshold of life and death in Rome—his own life and death, where he suffered a martyr’s end for that same act of confessing Jesus as Messiah.
- And now, on this Holy Day of St Peter, we too stand at a threshold. As three worthy Deacons are consecrated Priests, Sacred to Almighty God.

This will happen through a tangible, physical action, in the Imposition of Hands upon these deacons. A ‘laying-on’ of hands which, through our Archbishop Melissa, flows in a spiritual and tactile succession, from its Source in St. Peter and the Holy Apostles themselves.

Jonathan, Alecia, & Andre—you and your families have sacrificed much on a long and at times arduous journey to this Threshold.

The mysterious and awesome action of making you, the chosen few, into Christ's own priests, is for you and for your Church, the crossing of a Threshold. Through our Archbishop's prayer, through the Imposition of Hands, and through the powerful coming of the Holy Spirit, you will be imbued with unique capacities and powers. These will be detailed, one-by-one, in the Examen to follow. But, as a neighbourhood priest, let me call attention to some community dimension of your high Calling.

For, as visible and living sacraments of Christ's presence in the world, you will be called on to lead the Holy Church in facing outward. In working for justice in our world and our own backyard. In practical steps to protect God's good Earth which we have so deeply harmed. In acts of genuine reconciliation and solidarity with the First Peoples of Land and Sea. In walking with the addicted, the traumatized, and the mentally ill, all of them . . . members of our communities, and many members of our families. And in engaging the community, at its places of greatest brokenness and need.

No . . . Small . . . Task . . .

In which you, like Peter, will be given—

No . . . Small . . . Grace . . .

Which brings us back to this moment as you stand at this Threshold, and back to the God, who calls you now to step across it.