

From the Deacon's Desk

Gospel Today:

Handing over a set of keys is a symbolic gesture, even in our world today. Handing over the car keys to a new driver expresses trust in them, even though they are inexperienced and it may be frightening to do so. Handing over the keys to your home may mean you trust someone else to care for it responsibly for a short time, or that you are ready to relinquish ownership of it to them completely.

The symbolism of keys and authority guides our readings today. In the first reading, we hear Isaiah proclaiming God's judgement on Shebna's poor leadership. Shebna was King Hezekiah's chief of staff, and was taking advantage of his position to build an impressive tomb for himself. He also encouraged the king to rely on human wisdom rather than trusting God's wisdom. Shebna personified the behavior of the wealthier people of his time: conspicuous consumption, while ignoring the needs of the poor. So God fires Shebna, and chooses Eliakim to replace him. He places the key of the House of David [Jesus' lineage] on Eliakim's shoulder.

Isaiah's message to them, and to the Jewish people, is clear: God gives authority to those who lead according to his commandments. God removes authority from those who put their own interests first, and who neglect and exploit the needs of the most vulnerable.

In the Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, Who do people say that the Son of Man is? Simon Peter proclaims, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus blesses him and reveals that Peter's awareness of who Jesus is comes from his Father. Jesus tells Peter that he will be the rock on which his Church is built, and says, I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

When Jesus blesses Peter for acknowledging that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God, he is not only elevating Peter, but the whole community of disciples, as the "rock-solid" foundation of the Church that will carry on his mission. Like God with Eliakim, he is entrusting them with the keys that ensure God will be the source of wisdom for their decisions.

We too are entrusted with keys – keys to one another's hearts; keys to one another's vulnerabilities; and by the grace of God and our baptism, keys to our portion of building the kingdom of God. Let us be worthy of and faithful to that trust.

Children's Church:

The Church recognizes that young children have special needs when celebrating the Liturgy. Our parish offers Children's Liturgy of the Word (called Children's Church) during the 9:30 a.m. Mass, and for the most part, Carol Gall is the only person who leads the children's reflection. Carol has asked that there be other catechists

to help her share this ministry. Rather than Carol do it every week, she'd like to do it twice a month, with one or two people being responsible for the other weeks.

During Children's Church, the kids leave the assembly to hear and pray the Gospel in age-appropriate ways. They then return to their families to continue the Liturgy of the Eucharist. If you'd like more information on what is required, please see Carol or Jerry.

Backpack Blessing:

Because I live and work across the street from the hub and heartbeat of this town's life, Shepherd Public schools, I often see students walking to school carrying their days life work backpacks. Sometimes the backpacks look so heavy and cumbersome, as I try to remember if I ever had so many books to carry with me for homework.

Today, at Mass we bless the students and backpacks that will be carried to and from school by the children, youth, and college young adults. These backpacks symbolize the life of our students; they contain work to be done, and completed work well done.

Some days, so much stuff will fill these backpacks that the students may find it difficult to walk. Other days, they will be light and nearly empty. But on each and every day, these backpacks represent the students and as a community of faith, we want the students to remember that we walk with them and keep them in prayer.

Gracious God, we lift to you today, these students. They stand here ready to receive your blessings and they commit themselves to study and learning in the school year ahead. We ask your blessing on each of them and their backpacks.

They will hold the school work of each student and will be carried from home to school and back again. As these students carry these backpacks, may they be reminded of the love and care of this church that surrounds them each school day.

We pray as well for the teachers and administrators in our schools. May they also be sustained by your blessings. May they be reminded that this faith community embraces their call to teaching and learning, and we surround them with love and care as well.

God of all knowledge and wisdom, these students and backpacks remind us that a new school year has begun. We pray your blessing on them and upon all students, young and old, as they begin a new year. Help them discover and develop the gifts you have given them. And as they grow in knowledge, help them also grow in kindness and compassion, learning respect for themselves and for others. We ask your blessing on parents, teachers, school staff, and all those who care for these students. Strengthen these students with encouragement, support, and love. In pray all this through Christ our Lord. Amen.