

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 16: 13-20. (R1) Is. 22: 15, 19-23. (R2) Rom. 11: 33-36.

Few passages in the New Testament have been so exhaustively scrutinized as Matthew's testimony to the primacy of Peter as narrated in next Sunday's Gospel.

For instance, is the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven identical with the power of binding and loosing on earth, which will be ratified in heaven? Or is the power of the keys a generic power of which the power of binding and loosing is only a specification?

This question is crucial, because the power of the keys was given to Peter alone, while the power of binding and loosing was also given to the other disciples (Mt. 18:18). If the two powers are the same, then all the other disciples also received the power of the keys. Matthew 18:18 would have been a democratization of the power given to Peter in Matthew 16:19.

Sunday's liturgy helps us resolve this crucial question. If the law of praying is the law for believing, if worship is the expression of faith, then the first reading selected in Sunday's liturgy can shed considerable light on this Petrine question. The first reading is perhaps the best Old Testament witness of the type of office our Lord intended for St. Peter.

The imagery of the keys, as used by Matthew, is drawn from the Old Testament. The prophet most regularly quoted by Matthew and most popular with his readers is Isaiah. Matthew's "I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" is an indirect quotation from Isaiah: "I will place the key of the house of David on his shoulder" (R1).

The significance of this quotation can be appreciated fully only when the reader realizes, as Matthew's audience no doubt did, that it comes in the context of a passage which describes the dismissal of King Hezekiah's master of the palace, Shebna, and his replacement by Eliakim. It describes in short the appointment of a man who is to function as the prime minister or, more properly, the vizier of the Davidic King.

The Hebrew master of the palace, or prime minister, was patterned on that of Egypt. This was the position conferred on Joseph after he had interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh.

Describing the functions of a vizier, De Vaux says, "Every morning he will send someone to open the gates of the King's house, to admit those who have to enter, and to send out those who have to go out." The master of the palace was the highest official in the state. He alone appeared with the King; and, in the absence of the Pharaoh, he acted as regent of the kingdom.

Recall that Matthew opens his gospel with a genealogy which established Jesus as a true descendant of King David. In Chapters 8 and 9, he demonstrates that Jesus had performed miracles which Isaiah predicted the Messiah would work. Peter confesses Jesus is that Messiah. And that Messiah, who is also the Davidic King of Israel, says, "You are Rock... I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (the Christian community).

In other words, Matthew could not have found a better way to express his belief in the primacy of Peter and his successors as the vicars of Christ than by having Jesus use the words used by a King of Judah to appoint a new vicar or viceroy or, more properly, master of the palace.

In this context, therefore, the power of the keys is not synonymous with the power of binding and loosing. Peter is prime minister in the kingdom Jesus came to proclaim and the power of binding and loosing is only a specification of the broader power of allowing or refusing entrance into the kingdom. The broad power of the keys is given to Peter alone; the limited power of binding and loosing recalcitrant Christians is shared with the other apostles (Mt. 18:18).

The Sunday liturgy suggests that the power given Peter still perdures in the Church as a sign of God's enduring faithfulness. "Lord, your love is eternal" (Response).

Not for self-glorification does the Church claim this power for Peter and his successors. For Christ's authority is an authority of service. That is why the proudest title of the Vicars of Christ on earth is "Servant of the servants of God."

Team Ministry At Mt. Carmel

Two pastoral assistants at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church have been named co-pastors. Sister Carol Fox and Sister Mary Regis Straughn will serve the parish with Father Laurence Tracy.

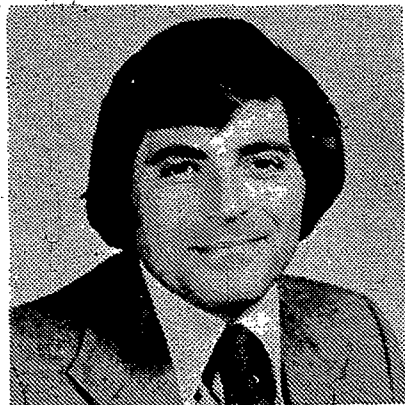
As pastoral assistants, the Sisters filled many roles traditionally belonging to the priest. They carried Communion to the sick, read scripture during Mass, conducted Bible studies, and ministered to the needs of the people in the neighborhood, an old Italian parish with many Spanish-speaking and black residents.

The responsibilities of Sister Carol and Sister Regis expanded beyond the duties of the pastoral assistant, however, last spring when Father Raymond Booth, the former co-pastor, was transferred to St. Christopher's in North Chili. In his absence the Sisters assisted Father Tracy by assuming administrative responsibilities in addition to their pastoral ministries. Their appointment as co-pastors thus formalizes the team ministry that has developed in recent months.



Lethal Tote Bags

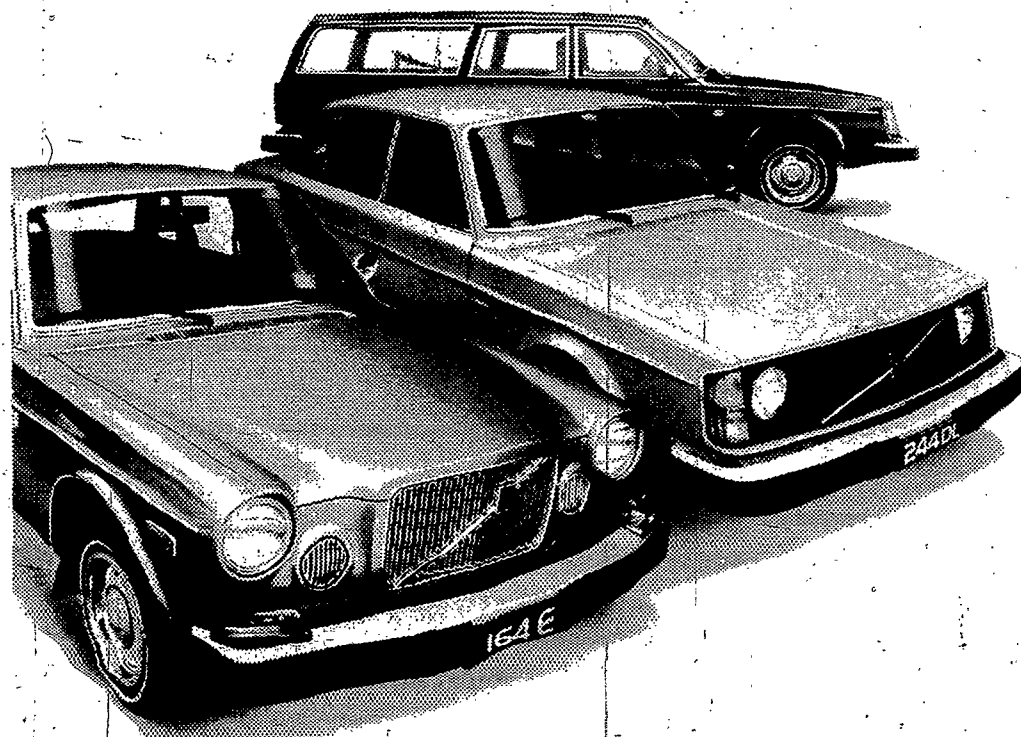
Women of St. Pius Tenth Church have been making a lethal tote bag to be given away at a booth at their forthcoming Country Fair. The bags are made of denim for the most part, and the lethal note is found in the wood base of the tote bag. Each bag has a 3-by-10 inch laminated wood base that a girl can use as a weapon against an attacker. Patty Guinan, Pam Green, Pat Howden and Lisa Scopa are shown with some of the tote bags that will be featured at the Country Fair on the church grounds, 3000 Chili Avenue, Saturday Aug. 23 and Sunday Aug. 24.



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