And so St. Peter is standing at the Pearly Gates. Two doctors and an HMO manager arrive. St. Peter asked them to identify themselves. One doctor stepped forward and said: "I was a pediatric surgeon and helped kids survive from serious illnesses". St. Peter said, "Wonderful. You can enter." The second doctor said, "I was a psychiatrist. I helped people overcome depression and addictions". St. Peter said “Wonderful. Please come in.” The third applicant stepped forward and said, "I was an HMO manager. I made sure people got cost-effective health care." St. Peter looked at him carefully and thought about it. The HMO manager nervously asked, “Well, can I come in”? St. Peter finally replied, “Sure. You have been approved for three days”.

We human have a fascination with locks and keys! We have expressions like the keys to the game, the keys to the city, and the keys to the kingdom. I think there could possibly be a day in a decade or so when kids will have to be told what a key looks like as nowadays keys are being slowly replaced by number pads, automatic door openers and such. Smart phones can be unlocked with a thumb print and soon it will be face recognition I am told. However, the metaphor of locks and keys are still helpful to us. In our first reading, Eliakim received from the Lord the key to the House of David. In the Gospel reading Peter received the keys to the Kingdom of God. And although I think it is human nature to want to focus on the positive here, it is also important to point out in our first reading that the keys were taken away from Shebna in favor of Eliakim. In our Gospel reading, by using the metaphor of keys, Jesus also makes it clear that heaven does not have an open door policy, which can be an unsettling thought. However, that Jesus entrusts the keys to Peter should give us all great hope, and underscores how important a role the Apostolic Church has regarding our salvation. Or in the words of St. Paul today, “How inscrutable are God’s judgements and how unsearchable are his ways!” The message this weekend, however, seems to be even more basic. How heaven is locked to locked hearts! How heaven is opened to open hearts!

Although Jesus gives Peter the keys to the kingdom, it is clear that Jesus wants something from Peter in return. Jesus wants to key to Peter’s heart. And Jesus wants the keys to our hearts as well! And as intuitive as that message can be, how easy it is for us sinners to go through the week or even a lifetime without truly opening our hearts to the Lord. On the one hand, we want Jesus to always be there for us, on our terms, but do we really want to be always there for him? It is therefore spiritually healthy to ask ourselves at times, what are the areas in my mind, heart and soul that I try to lock off from the Lord? What are the areas in my life that I wall off from Jesus?

Perhaps a more modern analogy to all this could be taken from our smart phones, the very devices that are replacing keys for a number of people. As we all know, every smart phone has a number of apps that you can open or shut at any time, some require codes and some require a thumb print. I think the temptation we have is to treat Jesus; and perhaps religion in general, like an app on our phone that we can open and close,
even lock whenever we want. Perhaps we open it several times a day or perhaps once or twice a month or when Sunday comes around. When we are at work or school, we are tempted to keep that app closed so we can open the work or school app while we are there. We also have a family app, sports app, entertainment app, and a politics app perhaps that we can keep separate from the religion app as well. My point here is this: when Jesus offers us salvation through his passion, death and resurrection, he sincerely is not looking to become just another app on our phone. Jesus wants to be the operating system by which all the other apps in our lives rest. From his point of view, the “apps” we access in our souls like family, school, work, sports and even politics ought to rest on the operating system of our faith in Jesus, who alone can offer us eternal life. Our phones cannot offer us that. Jesus can and he has given the keys to Peter.

Just like how we can sometimes be tempted to use our phones inappropriately, downloading apps and unlocking features we shouldn’t, in life too we can be tempted to access aspects of our culture that is not congruent with our faith. If we do this, we discover that our souls can become corrupted just like any computer can get corrupted by downloading things it shouldn’t. A good spiritual exercise could be to ask ourselves what areas in my life are unlocking my heart to Jesus and what areas in my life are closing the door to Jesus, locking him away from us. Just like we need to delete a faulty app from our phone or computer at times to keep it from taking up space or even harming the system, we need to do the same thing with certain activities or behaviors that are not good for us or are simply dangerous for our soul.

The Gospel can be very challenging this week for all of us, but it can also open new doors for us. The challenge I think is to open our whole being to the Lord like Eliakim and Peter did; our successes, our failures, our strengths, our weaknesses, our insecurities, our certainties, our uncertainties, even our dashed hopes. With all that life throws at us from time to time, we are invited to courageously and humbly unlock our hearts completely to the Lord. This process begins with prayer. We need to take the time to pray each day. We also would do well by listening to the Catholic Church, even if we struggle to do so at times. My friends, we learned something remarkable in today's Gospel reading. Entrance into heaven requires a key. Jesus gave that key to Peter and the Apostolic Church. We also learned that if we want to be welcomed into Jesus’ heart, we have to be ready to welcome Jesus into our hearts. We have an opportunity today for this as we approach the table of the Lord to receive the Holy Eucharist. When we receive the Eucharist, we receive Jesus who wants to be as close to us as food and drink. The sacraments of the Church unlock for us a deeper relationship with the Lord.