

Idioms in the English language can be strange things. Nothing really helps a guy realize this quite like having to write every single homily in two languages. Our poor Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters have likely been left scratching their heads at the completion of more than a few of my Spanish homilies! It doesn't always occur to me in time that I need to be more careful when using phrases that are absolutely commonplace to English-speakers. Thanks be to God, there have been no major faux pas to my knowledge, but it remains a very real fear of mine, that I would say something that seems innocuous to me, only to have our Hispanic community horrified by my choice of words...I have to rely heavily on the Holy Spirit to keep me from making such a mistake. It was in the process of writing a homily a few weeks back that I had to find a suitable facsimile for the phrase "from the horse's mouth" in order to complete a sermon in Spanish. While trying to workshop a few alternatives, it struck me how odd that phrase was, even in English. Long story short, I ended up diving down a linguistic rabbit hole, trying to find the origin of this particular quip. As

it turns out, this idiom has its roots in the competitive horse racing

circuit of the 1920's. It refers to the tendency of a gambler to place his bet based on the condition of a horse's teeth, which were studied in order to determine the overall health of the animal, and thus, its likelihood to do well in a race. If you were at the track in the early 20th century, and you wanted to place a winning bet, you could read all about the previous races...you could ask your friends for their opinions...you could study jockeys and question the high-rollers...but if you really wanted to base your decision on the best possible information, you had to go right to the source...you had to get it directly *'from the horse's mouth'*.

I don't really know if a horse's teeth can tell you all you need to know about its ability to win a race, but the logic behind this saying is air-tight. If we want to get the straight story on anything, we have to go to the source...interpretations can be tricky things...second hand information is notoriously unreliable, because it's often delivered through a filter. We all experience things directly in a subjective way. It can be very difficult for us to pass along information without adding

some level of editorialization. Our Blessed Lord knew this well, so He decided to give us in our Gospel today a direct and irrefutable link between Himself and His Church. **“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.”** Here it is - straight from the horse’s mouth! Two thousand years is a lot of time. God knew that, so long as weak and fallen human nature belonged to His church, there would be dissention...that there would be those who thought their personal interpretation of His word was more correct than others. In short, He understood well that, left to our own devices, there would only be fragmentation and disunity. This is not what He wanted for His bride, so, He gave us His Holy Spirit to establish and empower a centralized authority from the very beginning...an authority that, despite the weakness and inconstancy of the men who held the office, would persist to the end of time. **“I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and**

whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” This is Jesus speaking. He is being very, very clear. For those who call themselves Christians...those who desire to follow Jesus in all He commands...it would seem that there is only one true home for them, and it is here, in the Church Jesus Himself started.

The argument for Petrine authority, and its passing on through the ages from pope to pope is one that often comes up in apologetics. It's interesting to note how our current understanding of Papal authority and the formation of the hierarchy of the Church dovetails almost perfectly with the events of our first reading today. Anyone who understands what is going on in this short passage from Isaiah would have to admit that it looks strikingly like what we see formed by the Apostles during the first century, and carried on to this day. The historical context of the first reading places it in the royal court of Hezekiah, where the prophet Isaiah is removing Shebna from office, and replacing him with Eliakim, per God's command. Isaiah says of Eliakim, ***“I will give over to him...authority...I will place the key of the House of David on***

Eliakim's shoulder...when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open.” This is a clear message that Jesus is intentionally alluding to in our Gospel when He speaks about Peter’s primacy. Notice how Eliakim is not being made king, but rather a steward of the King’s power. This authority is being given to him as an office. We see this evidenced by the fact that one man - Shebna - who was found unfit for the role was removed, and his replacement, Eliakim, is selected by Divine inspiration...by the movement of the Spirit...that he might then lead God’s people according to God’s will. All that’s missing in this action is the clear visual of white smoke pouring out of the roof of the Sistine Chapel!

Now, you might well be asking “Why is this so important?” That’s a valid question. The response lies in the need for Catholics today to do all they can to fight the ever-increasing evil of indifferentism. The authority of the Papacy informs the legitimacy of the Magisterium - the teaching body of the Church. The legitimacy of the Magisterium validates what we profess faith in. And what we profess faith in is

essential for salvation *in its entirety!* There is no more room for

“cafeteria Catholicism”. Truth is truth. This, for some reason, has

become a topic of contention in our modern world. We are so concerned

with political correctness, and the protection of feelings that we allow

ourselves to gloss over obvious truths. In the long run, this helps no one.

Our protestant brothers and sisters are just that...they are our brothers

and sisters. We share one Baptism, which means that our ultimate end is

the same...we work for the same goal...we have equal dignity in the

eyes of our Creator...but it should concern us that they may not have

access to all the channels of grace instituted for us by Christ Himself.

Those seven Sacraments that form the bedrock of our spiritual lives are

absolutely indispensable. We are not operating from a position of love,

if we are not actively trying to help our brothers and sisters come to the

fullness of communion with God in the Church He created and endowed

with power.

We have to be prepared to have these hard conversations with the

people in our lives, because it is absolutely a matter of life and death. If

we truly believe what we profess to believe when we say our Creed, then

it is incumbent on us to do the work necessary to bring others to the

same truth, whatever the cost. Our Lord tells us that the tree is known

by its fruit...in that case, what kind of fruit do we bear? If we are

complicit in furthering a message of religious indifferentism - that is to

say that there is no real difference between Christian religions...that all

are equally valid, and share equally in the truth - then the fruit we bear is

tainted. By allowing this erroneous perspective, we contradict three of

the four marks of the Church - One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.

Denominational separation is not oneness...it is not Catholic, or

universal...and it is not in keeping with succession from the Apostles.

When we hear this Gospel read, it should be to us a call to action.

There are members of Christ's body...our family...who are languishing

without the full complement of the Sacraments Jesus intended for His

people. We may be tempted to think that we can get by by simply

focusing on our own problems...working on our own spiritual

challenges...but if we are ignoring those in need who God has placed

right in front of us, then we are failing. No amount of personal spiritual progress is enough for us to excuse our dereliction of duty. Really, when we think about it, what we have to do is so infinitesimally small, that it's shameful to think we avoid it in the first place. All God asks of us, is that we offer the invitation - that's it. God works on converting the heart...we only have to plant the seed. Invite a friend to Mass...enter into conversations about the faith...invite questions from those who are receptive to the truth...most importantly, live your faith boldly each and every day. Our example tends to be our strongest tool for evangelization. By doing these simple things with courage and charity, we help to complete the work begun by our Lord in establishing His Church - the sanctification of all the world, and the return of His scattered brothers and sisters to the Father. This is how we bear good fruit, in the tradition of St. Peter, and all the Apostles. If we busy ourselves with their work now, we can be sure of a share in their reward at the end of our days. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!