

The Office of the Keys

What is the Office of the Keys?

The Office of the Keys is that special authority that Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent.

Where is this written?

This is what St. John the Evangelist writes in chapter twenty: The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (John 20:22-23).

What do you believe according to these words?

I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.

When we think of the Office of the Keys, we usually think of the public expression of this, which the church has entrusted to pastors. But we also must understand that this authority is not just for the clergy. When Christ breathed on the disciples and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven*" (**John 20:22-23**), He was giving this gift to the whole people of God. When He said in **Matthew 18**, "*Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*" (**Matthew 18:18**), He was giving instruction to the whole church. The church has entrusted this authority for public use to pastors for the sake of order. But we each have the power, authority, right, and obligation to either forgive sins or withhold forgiveness. We can do this because the world is divided up into two types of people. We're all sinners, but there are repentant sinners and unrepentant sinners. People who repent receive forgiveness and people who do not repent have forgiveness withheld from them. When someone apologizes, it is our right and duty to forgive them as Christ has forgiven us. It's that simple.