

About 24 years ago, I completed an apprenticeship in the New Zealand Army as a Boilermaker – someone who builds things out of steel. Once I completed the necessary training, I became a tradesman. My roles and responsibilities increased, and my boss began to expect more from me. 18 years ago, I changed jobs and retrained as a personal trainer specialising in weight loss and injury rehabilitation. My roles and responsibilities were greater because people depended on me. It was the same when I became a priest: a time of training, followed by ordination, and an increase in roles and responsibilities. Each time, it felt like I was being given keys that opened doors beyond my current capacity.

In a faith sense, different kinds of keys are given to different people – not according to age or gender, but according to God's will and our "Yes" to using the gifts we've been given to carry out our mission. In this parish, our mission is ***to be a vibrant community that actively accompanies people to encounter Jesus***. With those different keys come different levels of responsibility. Both Eliakim in our first reading, and Peter in the Gospel, for example, are given the master keys along with all the responsibility.

In our parish, there are many ***different*** roles and responsibilities – from the very specific, which carry high levels of responsibility, such as the priest, the pastoral leader, roster coordinator and sacristan – to more general roles which are ***no less important***, such as welcoming, serving and giving. The ***curious*** thing about the Church though, is that, culturally, people can belong with absolutely no responsibility. This is a double-edged sword because

while it necessarily allows people to come and try us out, but it also means we don't always encourage people to take up responsibility. My dream for our parish is that we embrace the role and responsibility that Jesus reveals to those who recognise Him: "You are Peter," He says... you are Georgia, John, Maddison, Levi, Margaret, and upon **you** will I build my church because I give you my very self – my Body and Blood. **I give you the Keys to the Kingdom** – the role and responsibility of **becoming what you receive** so that you can share me with others.

On Tuesday evening this past week, the 55 children who are making their First Holy Communion this weekend gathered for their final training session. During the one-hour class, I read today's Gospel and asked them: *"In light of everything you've learnt over the past four weeks about gathering for Mass, listening to Jesus speak, receiving His Body and Blood, and being sent out at the end – what would you do if you were given the keys to the Kingdom for a day?"* I got them to scan a QR code on the screen with their parent's mobile and submit their answer. Honestly, I was blown away by their responses. They demonstrated that they understand the roles and responsibilities that comes with faith. Their answers included teaching others about the faith, helping the vulnerable, offering and accepting hospitality, prayer, moral guidance and simple acts of kindness – in essence, sharing what they've received with others.

In a specific sense, some of the submissions deserve to be read out verbatim: ***"Pray for people in the church***, one child wrote, ***by asking them what they want prayer for*** – which we offer after Mass every weekend! Another wrote, ***"I would tell people about***

God by having a big story time” – sharing testimony. **“After the stories, we would have a big lunch and get to know the families and become friends.”** Another said, **“I would have a fundraiser for the homeless and provide food and clothing to those in need.”** We have five St Vincent de Paul conferences filled with volunteers who are passionate about doing exactly that! And finally, someone said, **“Talk to God.”** The beautiful irony of this last one is that talking to God is the role and responsibility of every baptised person – praying every day in stillness, silence and solitude.

Friends, God always calls and stretches us because we’ve been given the key to roles and responsibilities **beyond** our current capacity. For some, that will mean offering themselves in friendship, while for others, it will be serving in a recognised ministry. For our 55 children, it means talking with your parents about what it means to belong to this parish. But above all, and this is for all of us as we receive Jesus’ Body and Blood today, it means accepting the role and responsibility to share what we have received – God’s love and our faith – with others. Amen.