

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Reading I: Isaiah 22:19-23](#)

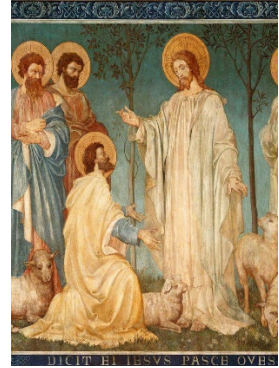
[Responsorial Psalm: 138:1-2, 2-3, 6, 8](#)

[Reading II: Romans 11:33-36](#)

[Gospel: Matthew 16:13-20](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/082723.cfm>



Isaiah writes in the eighth century before Christ in the southern kingdom of Judah. He warns that Shebna, the prime minister, (Master of the palace) that he is about to lose his position. He has Abused his authority by preparing an elaborate tomb and trusted more in his chariots, than in God for protection from the Assyrians. The key, a symbol of authority, will pass from him to Eliakim who will serve God faithfully and care for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This passage gives background and highlights the symbols of authority that give background to the interaction between Jesus and Peter.

Previous to our Gospel passage, Jesus had been healing people. When the Pharisees and Sadducees see this, they ask Jesus for a sign to prove who he is. Jesus does not misuse his power to prove himself. Having heard the voice at his baptism, Jesus knows that he is the beloved Son. Jesus asks how others, particularly the apostles, understand him. Jesus confronts the authorities and reminds people of John the Baptist. Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot and was expected to come before the messiah. He reminded others of Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

Jesus then asks the apostles about who they think he is. Peter responds that he is the "Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter has been gifted with that revelation but does not fully understand it. Jesus thus instructs the disciples to not tell anyone that he is the Christ because they do not know what they are saying.

Christ is the Greek word for messiah. The common expectation was that the Messiah would be a warrior king who would free the Jewish people from oppression and begin a time of great prosperity and peace. Jesus did not come to be a political messiah but as one who would inaugurate the inbreaking of the Reign of God. All the previous expectations about the messiah would need to be surrendered.

Jesus gives Simon Bar-Jonah a new name. In Aramaic, it is Kepha, and translated into Greek is petra, Peter. It means Rock. This was not a personal name in first-century Judah. It is given to highlight Peter's role in establishing the new community of faith. Isaiah 51: 1-2 designates Abraham and Sarah as "the rock from which you were hewn" and "the pit from which you were quarried" for the people of Israel.

Peter is also given the keys to the kingdom. In ancient times, there was only one key to a lock. The person who had the key had the authority to decide when to use it. They were in charge of the household. Peter is given the key to manage the household that Christ was establishing. St. Paul makes references to the church as the household of God.

A third image in this passage is the authority to bind and loose. In Judaism, this referred to the authority of the chief rabbi. He had the authority to decide on the application of scripture to a particular situation. Sometimes, it referred to the authority to decide who was in and who was excluded from the community.

In looking at the sum of these statements, it has been the position of the Catholic Church that Jesus established Peter in a leadership position over this new community of the Church. This role included the determination of authentic teaching and preserving the unity of

believers. This role has been debated over the centuries, but it remains an important function of Church leaders.

The passage from the Letter to the Romans is a doxology. Paul has been reflecting on the role of the Jewish people in the history of salvation. He has struggled with the fact that they have not accepted Jesus as the savior and how this opens the saving message to the Gentiles. He now sums all of it up and declares that God's ways cannot be penetrated by the human mind. All statements about God are partial for God is infinite, always beyond human words. The response of believers can only be to praise and thank God for all that God has done. "To him be glory forever. Amen."

Themes:

Jesus, human and divine
Peter

Messiah
Apostolic succession

Reflection Questions:

How would you respond to Jesus if he asked you, "Who do you say I am?"

What significance do the words of Jesus to Peter have for you?

How do you understand the ministries of authentic teaching and church unity in the life of a faith community?

When words run out, how do you express yourself to God?

Prayer Suggestions:

For the Church: that we may boldly profess in word and deed that Jesus is Lord and help others to come to know and follow him

For the grace of awe: that we may recognize the great love and generosity that God has for us and share more fully in the life of the Trinity each day

For Christian unity: that Christ will unite us in witnessing to the Gospel, in better understanding of each other, and in working together to help those who are suffering

For Pope Francis, successor to St. Peter: that the Holy Spirit will guide him in proclaiming the Good News, promoting unity in the Church, and inspiring us to greater love and service