

Sunday, August 23, 2026 – Twenty-first Sunday of Easter Year A

First Reading - Isaiah 22:19-23

A reading from the prophet Isaiah

I place the key of the House of David upon his shoulder.

Thus says the Lord of hosts to Shebna, the master of the palace:

I dismiss you from your office,
I remove you from your post,
and the same day I call on my servant
Eliakim son of Hilkiah.
I invest him with your robe,
gird him with your sash,
entrust him with your authority;
and he shall be a father
to the inhabitants of Jerusalem
and to the House of Judah.
I place the key of the House of David
on his shoulder;
should he open, no one shall close,
should he close, no one shall open.
I drive him like a peg
into a firm place;
he will become a throne of glory
for his father's house.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 137:1-3. 6. 8. R. v.8

(R.) Lord, your love is eternal;

do not forsake the work of your hands.!

Second Reading - Romans 11:33-36

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans

From him, through him, and in him are all things.

How rich are the depths of God – how deep his wisdom and knowledge – and how impossible to penetrate his motives or understand his methods! Who could ever know the mind of the Lord? Who could ever be his counsellor? Who could ever give him anything or lend him anything? All that exists comes from him; all is by him and for him. To him be glory for ever! Amen.

Gospel Acclamation - Matthew 16:18

Alleluia, alleluia!

You are Peter, the rock on which I will build my Church;

the gates of hell will not hold out against it.

Alleluia!

Gospel - Matthew 16:13-20

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

You are Peter, to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ,' he said, 'the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.' Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to tell anyone that he was the Christ..

Recognising Jesus' True Identity

Reflection on the Gospel-21st Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

(Matthew 16:13-19)

Veronica Lawson RSM

Jesus' true identity is a key issue for Matthew's community, as it is for us. "Be yourself. Everybody else is taken", sings Melinda Schneider. The lyrics of this song, composed for Melinda's dying father, affirm some fairly obvious truths. Even though we know that "everybody else is taken", most of us spend energy trying to measure up to other peoples' expectations and fail to be truly ourselves. In our self-absorption, we can also misread others and fail to know them as they are. Accepting ourselves and being accepted as we are is among the most precious of gifts. Jesus knew this. He was utterly true to himself and he allowed others time to discover for themselves his real identity and the nature of his mission. If the mission were to succeed, then his followers needed to look beyond their preconceptions about him and accept him as God's anointed, as the revelation of the living God.

From the outset, Jesus is presented as the anointed of God, the Messiah or the Christos. Before his birth, the reader knows him as "Emmanuel", God with us. What the narrator asserts at the outset, certain characters in the story come to understand. Jesus' fearless teaching and his healing ministry bring the crowd to recognise him as a prophet and as the incarnate Wisdom of God. The power of God at work in Peter leads him to a deep understanding of Jesus' identity. Peter has faltered in the past and will falter again, even to the point of denying any knowledge of or association with Jesus. He finally arrives at deep insight, however, and proclaims his faith in Jesus as both Christ/Messiah and son of the living God. Insight is a gift and God can work wherever there is openness and goodwill. Peter is presented here as having both. He is declared "blessed" on account of this gift of insight and entrusted with the "keys" of God's empire.

The specific power of binding and loosing that is given to Peter is subsequently given to the community of disciples (18:18). The saying is framed by instructions about dealing with transgressors

and by the assertion that where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, he is there in their midst. “Binding and loosing” belong to all who gather in the name of Jesus whom Matthew presents as God-with-us, as prophet and Wisdom, as the Christ and as the revelation of the living God. The exercise of the power “to bind and to loose” demands the same wisdom and insight as does the capacity to recognise and affirm the true identity of Jesus. Gathering in the name of Jesus is a challenge at any time. It is a particular challenge in the face of the disillusionment and hurt caused by abuse of the most vulnerable in our midst. We pray for the wisdom to find new ways of being church and of truly dealing with transgression.