

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #121

READING I Isaiah 22:19–23

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Thus says the LORD to Shebna, master of the palace:

**“I will thrust you from your office
and pull you down from your station.**

**On that day I will summon my servant
Eliakim, son of Hilkiah;**

**I will clothe him with your robe,
and gird him with your sash,
and give over to him your authority.**

**He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem,
and to the house of Judah.**

**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.**

**I will fix him like a peg in a sure spot,
to be a place of honor for his family.”**

Isaiah = Ī-ZAY-uh

Shebna = SHEB-nah

A poetic reading in whose rhythms express
the powers and convictions of the Lord.

Eliakim = ee-LĪ-uh-kim

Hilkiah = hil-KĪ-uh

Take note of the inversion: “opens”/“shut”;
“shuts”/“open.” Give them emphasis.

TO KEEP IN MIND

If you are assigned to proclaim
the first reading, read the Gospel
for that week as well. They are
connected in thematic ways.

READING I

This reading exhibits a popular literary theme based on the “keeper of the keys,” wherein someone has power and insider knowledge because of the responsibility given to them to control entry into the place. Here we have Shebna, who holds the keys that will allow the king entrance, being replaced by a new steward named Eliakim. This exchange takes place during the reign of Hezekiah, the thirteenth king of Judah who ruled in the late eighth to early seventh century BC. The Lord has determined that the king’s chief steward must be replaced

because he has become prideful by building a tomb for himself and taking pride in his chariots, among other things that might bring shame to the king (Isaiah 22:16–18).

The Lord describes the confidence he has in selecting Eliakim to replace Shebna by the vesture of his office. He will be clothed with Shebna’s own robe and sash, which serves to mark the transition of authority from Shebna to Eliakim. Unlike Shebna’s display of infidelity, Eliakim will be like a “father” to the people. This means that he will not take advantage of the role entrusted to him. Finally, Eliakim will be

given the “key of the House of David.” Keys are often used as a symbol of authority. It will be Eliakim’s decision whom to admit to the king’s palace and whom to reject. He is not to be understood as any mere door-keeper, but he is to be a steward who has great care and concern for all in his responsibility. Because the Lord’s confidence in this servant is so great, he will become an honor for his family.

READING II

Paul’s hymn of wonder over the wisdom revealed in God’s plan must be read within the frame-

For meditation and context:

A short and powerful reading from Paul, expressed with great passion.
 inscrutable = in-SKROO-tuh-b*! (unknowable)

Note how the prepositions supply the power: "from," "through," and "for."

work of the apostle's overall mission to the Gentiles. Paul himself surely must have been utterly amazed at the work of God in his own conversion from being a strident persecutor of the Christian way to leading the charge to spread the Gospel to peoples far removed from Jerusalem. Paul has just reminded the Romans that while the Jewish people continue to receive God's favor, the conversion of the Gentiles to Christ has allowed God to display the gift of his mercy, which the chosen people of Israel are invited to accept (Romans 11:1–29).

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 138:1–2, 2–3, 6, 8 (8bc)

R. Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart,
 for you have heard the words of my mouth;
 in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise;
 I will worship at your holy temple.

I will give thanks to your name, because of your kindness and your truth: when I called, you answered me; you built up strength within me.

The LORD is exalted, yet the lowly he sees, and the proud he knows from afar. Your kindness, O LORD, endures forever; forsake not the work of your hands.

READING II Romans 11:33–36

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!

For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor?

Or who has given the Lord anything that he may be repaid?

For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

This brief hymn proclaims there is no wisdom and knowledge comparable to God's. This theme of praise can be seen in Old Testament texts that champion God's wisdom (for example, Wisdom 17:1). For Paul, it is simply impossible to plumb the depths of God's knowledge. Furthermore, the hymn proclaims that God acts alone and has no need of advice in carrying out his plan for creation. Though human beings may not understand God's ways, God is the beginning, the sustainer, and the end of all that is. As the conclusion of Paul's exhortation on the place of the people of Israel in

God's plan of salvation, this hymn conveys the message that it would be utter foolishness to do anything but cooperate fully with God's wisdom and thus work toward a bond of unity between Jews and Gentiles.

GOSPEL Today's reading from Matthew is generally considered to be the chief evangelical text for our understanding of the Church's foundation. While the story of Peter's profession of faith is recorded in Mark 8:27–30 and in Luke 9:18–21, it is only in Matthew that Jesus calls Simon "Peter," or "the Rock"

GOSPEL Matthew 16:13–20

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples,

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter said in reply,

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus said to him in reply,

“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,

and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.

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.”

Then he strictly ordered his disciples

to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Caesarea Philippi = sez-uh-REE-uh fih-LIP-ī

This reading is a set piece in which Jesus, in asking the disciples to tell him what people are saying about him, designates Peter as the one to receive the keys to his kingdom. As such, it has a vivid, narrative quality.

Slight pause between “Peter” and “said.”

Even emphasis on “upon this rock.”

Note the parallel: bind-earth-bound-heaven
|| loose-earth-loosed-heaven.

The conclusion is mysterious. You can allow some of that mystery and slight confusion to slip into your tone.

(from the Greek, *petra/Petros*; and the Aramaic, *kēpā/Kēphas*), and gives him the power to forgive sins. What is evident here is the influence of the early Church, which presents itself as solid, authoritative, and clearly organized.

The location for this story, in the land north of Galilee, very near to Gentile territory, is important. Matthew designs his Gospel so that the first profession of faith is uttered not in Jerusalem but in a place some distance from the center. When asked by Jesus “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” the disciples reply with

a variety of well-known figures in the Hebrew faith— John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah—but the follow-up question “But who do you say that I am?” suggests that the disciples are more insiders than these classic figures. Furthermore, Peter’s profession of Jesus’ identity being both “the Christ” and “the Son of the living God” suggests divine wisdom. True knowledge of Jesus can only be granted by God himself. “Flesh and blood” alone, meaning human knowledge, is incapable of grasping the mystery of God revealed in Jesus; this gift comes from above.

At such a profound statement of faith and openness to the Spirit, Jesus does not simply offer words of praise but instead grants him complete authority over his future mission. “The Rock” is to provide a firm foundation for the earthly Church and to make heavenly entrance possible by the forgiveness of sins. The Church is completely life-giving, with no power of death able to conquer it. Like Eliakim being in charge of the keys to the palace in the first reading, Peter is a righteous steward called to manage well the affairs of God’s household. S.W.