

Twenty-First Sunday Ordinary Time
† Sunday, 23 August 2020



In England and Wales Cycle of Prayer:
For strangers, foreigners, seafarers and travellers
Keynote: The true power of authority is one of service

Prophet Isaiah 22:19-23

Different cultures have their own symbols for authority and power. Here in this passage from Isaiah, Shebna – described as ‘master of the palace’ is demoted, and stripped of the signs of his office, and his authority within the palace. In his place, one, Eliakim is given power, *‘I invest him with your robe, gird him with your sash, entrust him with your authority... 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.’* The ‘key’ – most likely a great iron or bronze key – would have been worn over the shoulder, and was a powerful sign of the authority of the master of the palace. Even today, the ‘key of the door’ symbolises status and responsibility for the one who has it. But such ownership also brings with it responsibilities, to act with prudence, to serve others by opening and welcoming, and by ensuring the security of all by shutting the door.

Responsorial Psalm 137 [138] – A song of thanksgiving to a faithful God

Letter of Paul to the Romans 11:33-36

Having spoken earlier in his letter how God offers salvation to the non-Jew as well as to the people of Israel, Paul now exclaims in thanksgiving, *‘How rich are the depths of God – how deep God’s wisdom and knowledge – how impossible it is to penetrate God’s motive or understand his methods? Who could ever know the mind of the Lord?’* The apostle then expresses his thanksgiving for God’s mercy and wisdom in offering salvation to all with a prayer of praise, *‘All that exists comes from God, all is by him and for him. To him be glory forever! Amen.’* We might join Paul in that moment of praise and thanksgiving.

Gospel according to Matthew 16:13-20

‘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...? But you who do you say I am?” It is a question that Jesus asks us still to this very day. It is for each of us, a daily challenge of faith. That day at Caesarea Philippi, it was the disciple Simon Peter who spoke up on behalf of the others. *‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’* Jesus’ replies, *‘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.’*

To Simon, so blessed by the Father, Jesus says, *‘So now I 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 bound on earth shall be considered bound in heaven...’* Thus the man Simon Peter is chosen by Jesus to be the strength and bedrock of faith in the Christian community. It is an authority of service in the Church.

NOTE

‘You are a happy...’ in Greek *‘makarios’* means blessed by God

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