

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – 23 AUGUST 2026



COLLECT

O God, who cause the minds of the faithful
to unite in a single purpose,
grant your people to love what you command
and to desire what you promise,
that, amid the uncertainties of this world,
our hearts may be fixed on that place
where true gladness is found.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

Fishing can be wonderfully relaxing. It gives us an excuse to sit and watch, quiet and still. Being a professional fisherman is another thing altogether. It is hard work, with difficult night hours, challenging weather, and sometimes it is not very productive. Peter was a professional fisherman. He came from a fishing family – his brother Andrew was his partner.

It is quite extraordinary, when you think about it, that Jesus would take these people as his companions and that he would entrust to them the continuation of his ministry after the Easter event. Yet Peter was a solid character. As with his boats and nets, he was a good organiser. He is often the one to speak first on behalf of the other apostles. Jesus regularly takes Peter, James and John aside as his closest collaborators. On Pentecost Day, it is Peter who stands up to speak to the crowd. Yes, he could be impulsive, but his commitment to Christ is unwavering. His leadership lasted for some three decades after Easter until he accepted the martyr's crown.

Look at today's Gospel text to see what Peter was like and what Jesus thought of him.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah**22:19-23**

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

I thank you, Lord, with all my heart,
you have heard the words of my mouth.
Before the angels I will bless you,
I will adore before your holy temple. **R.**

I thank you for your faithfulness and love
which excel all we ever knew of you.
On the day I called, you answered;
you increased the strength of my soul. **R.**

The Lord is high yet he looks on the lowly
and the haughty he knows from afar.
Your love, O Lord, is eternal,
discard not the work of your hands. **R.**

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans**11:33-36**

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.

First Reading

We are used to some shuffling in political
responsibilities from time to time. New
appointments to the portfolios of government will
occur after an election, for example. Here in this
reading is an obscure example of such a shuffle
seven hundred years before Christ in the reign of
Hezekiah in Judah.

The master of the household is dismissed and a
replacement is installed – with some ceremony!
What possible significance can this have for us?
Good question.

The link with the gospel is 'the authority of the
keys'. To be a holder of the keys is to have
power, to be able to open and close. Here a new
person is being put in charge.

The reader will need to check the pronunciation of
the proper names. For the rest, the sentences are
easy enough, though their significance will no
doubt remain obscure for the people.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 137/138 offers God praise and thanks. It
rejoices that God is faithful to all he has made
and loves it. God listens and answers our prayers;
God gives us strength.

The cantor/reader will see that the stanzas are
made up of regular couplets. Once again,
however, care will need to be taken with an
unusual two-part response. Hold the intonation at
the end of the first line and let it down gently in
the second. Coming to rest at the end will cue the
assembly's participation.

Second Reading

This text begins with a wondrous exclamation of
the sacred mystery of the transcendent God: *how
rich... how deep... how impossible to penetrate...*
Then three rhetorical questions lead to an
emphatic statement of faith in the creator which
ends with a doxology of praise.

Normally prepositions are not stressed. The end of
this reading would be an exception: 'from him, by
him, for him'.

This beautiful and powerful reading needs to be
taken slowly and read with a sense of awe and

reverence. The reader should try to move the listeners to worship.

**A reading from the holy 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?' 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.

Gospel

The papal coat of arms of the Holy See shows two crossed keys, one gold and one silver. They are a symbol of spiritual power (keys of the kingdom of heaven). The Petrine ministry is not about controlling or restricting God's grace, but rather about facilitating access to it. We say the power of the keys is exercised by the Bishop of Rome, successor of Peter, acting collegially with all bishops who are successors of the apostles.

The extent to which this understanding of the 'power of the keys' is embedded in this gospel text is debatable. Following Peter's bold affirmation of Jesus' identity, he is singled out for leadership. But it is the Christian community which receives the Lord's protection against the underworld. This extremely rare use of '*ekklesia/Church*' in the gospels suggests that Matthew is writing of this incident with hindsight.

Within today's community of the baptised, everyone needs to grapple with the question Jesus puts to his disciples: '*but you, who do you say I am?*' The challenge of the gospel calls us to an encounter with Christ; it summons us to believe in him.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time VI)

May God bless you with every heavenly blessing,
make you always holy and pure in his sight,
pour out in abundance upon you the riches of his glory,
and teach you with the words of truth;
may he instruct you in the Gospel of salvation,
and ever endow you with fraternal charity.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son,⁺ and the Holy Spirit,
come down on you and remain with you for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time VI, Roman Missal p. 717)

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah 22:19-23

Thus says the Lord God of hosts:

"Go to the steward, to Shebna,
who is master of the household, and say to him:
"I will thrust you from your office,
and you will be pulled down from your post.
On that day I will call my servant Eliakim son of Hilkiah,
and will clothe him with your robe and bind your sash on him.
I will commit your authority to his hand,
and he shall be a father
to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.
"I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David;
he shall open, and no one shall shut;
he shall shut, and no one shall open.
I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place,
and he will become a throne of honour to his ancestral house".

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (NRSV)

Psalm 138.1-2a, 2b-3, 6+8b (R.8b)

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

I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name
for your steadfast love and your faithfulness. **R.**

For you have exalted your name
and your word above everything.
On the day I called, you answered me,
you increased my strength of soul. **R.**

For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.
Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands. **R.**

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans 11:33-36

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments
and how inscrutable his ways!
"For who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?
Or who has given a gift to him,
to receive a gift in return?"
For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever. Amen.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi,
he asked his disciples,
"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"
And they said, "Some say John the Baptist,
but others Elijah.
and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."
He said to them,
"But who do you say that I am?"
Simon Peter answered,
"You are the Messiah,
the Son of the living God."
And Jesus answered him,
"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah!
For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you,
but my Father in heaven.
And I tell you, you are Peter,
and on this rock I will build my church,
and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.
I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven,
and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,
and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."
Then Jesus sternly ordered the disciples
not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.