

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Mass Readings & Spiritual Leadership Guide

August 23, 2026 · Lectionary 121

Sunday Mass Readings

FIRST READING

Isaiah 22:19–23

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.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 138:1–2, 2–3, 6, 8

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

***Men Helping Men Step Up and Become Better Spiritual Leaders
by Following Christ and the Teachings of His Church***



SECOND READING

Romans 11:33–36

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.

GOSPEL

Matthew 16:13–20

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.

All readings sourced from USCCB, Lectionary 121. bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/082326.cfm

Reflection

Authority in God's economy does not belong to those who seize it—it is entrusted by God to those he chooses. Isaiah's oracle removes Shebna and installs Eliakim, placing the key of the House of David on his shoulder: the authority to open and shut belongs to the one God appoints, not the one who assumes. In the Gospel, Jesus presses his disciples with the most important question anyone can answer: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter's confession—"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"—is not his own insight; it is a revelation from the Father. On that revealed truth, Jesus builds his Church and entrusts Peter with the keys. Paul closes with doxology: all wisdom, all authority, all things flow from God, through God, and back to God. The spiritual leader these readings form is one who holds authority as stewardship, not ownership—one whose leadership is grounded not in self-confidence but in a clear, confessed answer to Jesus' question.

Leadership Principles

PRINCIPLE 1

Authority Is Entrusted, Not Assumed

God removes Shebna and installs Eliakim—placing the key of the House of David not on the most ambitious man but on the one God chooses (Is 22:22). Leaders who treat authority as something they have earned or seized will eventually lose it. Those who hold it as a trust from God will steward it with humility and accountability.

PRINCIPLE 2

Answer Jesus' Question Before You Lead Anyone Else

Jesus does not ask, "What do the crowds think?" He asks, "But who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15). Your effectiveness in leading others begins with your own answer to that question. Leading from secondhand faith—what others believe, what the tradition says—will not sustain you through the storms of real life. The question demands a personal answer.

PRINCIPLE 3

Revelation Is the Foundation of Great Leadership

Peter's confession did not come from flesh and blood—it came from the Father (Mt 16:17). Jesus builds his Church on this revealed truth, not on Peter's personality or courage. The most important things you learn about God, people, and mission will not come from strategy sessions or personal intelligence. They will come from time spent with the Father.

PRINCIPLE 4

The Keys Carry Responsibility, Not Just Power

Jesus gives Peter the keys of the kingdom—but with them comes the weight of binding and loosing, of opening and shutting (Mt 16:19). Every key entrusted to a leader carries both privilege and burden. Leaders who focus only on the access authority gives them, without reckoning with its responsibilities, will misuse what they have been given.

***Men Helping Men Step Up and Become Better Spiritual Leaders
by Following Christ and the Teachings of His Church***



PRINCIPLE 5

Lead as One from Whom All Things Come Back to God

Paul's doxology is a compass for every leader: from him, through him, for him are all things (Rom 11:36). The leader's work is not ultimately about building their own name or legacy. It is about returning everything—results, credit, people, outcomes—to the One from whom it all came. Leadership that ends in doxology is leadership that has stayed oriented correctly.

Discussion Questions

QUESTION 1

God replaced Shebna because he was leading by pride and self-glorification. How can we lead our coworkers, friends, family members, etc., with humility instead of pride and arrogance?

QUESTION 2

Jesus asks, "But who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15). This is the most personal question in the Gospels. How would you answer it today—not with a catechism response, but in your own words from your own experience? Are you guiding your family and friends to who Jesus really is and toward their everlasting salvation?

QUESTION 3

Jesus entrusts Peter with the keys of the kingdom—authority to bind and loose (Mt 16:19). What "keys"—what authority, access, or influence—have been entrusted to you as a father or simply as a Christian?

QUESTION 4

Paul declares that all things are "for him"—to God be glory forever (Rom 11:36). As you look at yourself, how much of your life is oriented toward God's glory versus your own? Is there any specific area you would like to improve upon?

***Men Helping Men Step Up and Become Better Spiritual Leaders
by Following Christ and the Teachings of His Church***



Closing Action

A concrete, personal response drawn from the readings this week:

This week, write out your personal answer to Jesus' question: "Who do you say that I am?" Not a theological definition—your own words, from your own experience of him. Then write one sentence describing how your answer to that question should change the way you lead. Keep both sentences somewhere visible this week and let them guide you (Mt 16:15–16).

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." — Matthew 16:16

Closing Prayer

Lord God, all authority belongs to you. You remove leaders and raise them up; you place keys on shoulders and fix servants like pegs in sure spots. Keep us from treating your trust as our own achievement. Remind us, again and again, that what we hold we hold for you—and that the day will come when we give it back.

Jesus, you asked your disciples the question that cuts through everything: "Who do you say that I am?" We confess you as the Christ, the Son of the living God—not because flesh and blood has told us, but because you have revealed yourself. Build your Church on that confession. And build our leadership on it too, so that everything we do flows from a clear answer to your question.

Holy Spirit, you are the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God—inscrutable, unsearchable, beyond our capacity to advise or repay. Teach us to lead from that reality: not as those who have figured things out, but as those from whom all things come, through whom all things flow, and to whom all things return. To him be glory forever. Amen.

"Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands." — Psalm 138:8