

## 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday In Ordinary Time, Year A

### Isaiah 22:19-23

*Yahweh sends Isaiah the prophet to Shebna with this prophecy.*

<sup>19</sup>Thus says the Lord to Shebna, master of the palace: “I will thrust you from your office and pull you down from your station. Shebna was the master or major-domo of the royal palace of King Hezekiah, an office that made him practically prime minister to the king.<sup>3</sup> He had not fulfilled the office properly. In fact, he was plotting against Assyria with the help of the Egyptians in direct opposition to Isaiah’s position of neutrality.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>20</sup>On that day Yahweh is speaking--“On that day” is the indication of a new day, a new beginning.<sup>19</sup> I will summon my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah; We know very little about Eliakim except that he did replace Shebna as the master of the palace under Hezekiah and he was one of the ministers who negotiated with the officer of Sennacherib about the surrender of Jerusalem and who was sent to Isaiah to ask him to pray for the escape of the city.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>21</sup>I will clothe him with your robe, and gird him with your sash, and give over to him your authority. Eliakim will have Shebna’s distinctive methods of dress, the trappings of his position; as well as the authority which goes with it.<sup>19</sup> He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. This reflects the quality of Eliakim’s rule. He will care for them like they are his own children.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>22</sup>I will place the key of the House of David The key, symbol of the major-domo’s authority to grant or deny admittance to the royal presence, was worn over the shoulder.<sup>5</sup> The king’s high steward, as his representative, opened and closed the official court business of the day.<sup>18</sup> To have the key to the gates and doors of the royal palace, including the armory and the treasury, gave the holder enormous power.<sup>1</sup> The key of the House of David had passed down through the successors of the chief palace administrator of David to the chief palace administrator of King Hezekiah, the 14<sup>th</sup> king of Judah for between 300 and 400 years when it came to Eliakim. The image of the “keys” will appear again in the Gospel where the “keys” will be given to Peter and passed on to his successors where they are a telling symbol of the power to give entry into the kingdom of heaven.<sup>1</sup> on Eliakim’s shoulder; The placing of the key over Eliakim’s shoulder is a symbol of the switch of authority from Shebna to Eliakim. when he opens, no one shall shut when he shuts, no one shall open. Eliakim becomes a type of the ultimate leader, Jesus Christ, the descendant of the house of David who wields ultimate authority: “When he opens no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one opens.”(Rev 3:7) Notice that although the occupant of the position has changed, the position itself has remained unchanged.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>23</sup>I will fix him like a peg in a sure spot, to be a place of honor for his family. The family shares in the privileges of the official.<sup>19</sup> This is a messianic prophecy with hope at its heart since it is concerned with the future establishment of the House of David as “a sure place” with a “place of honor.”<sup>1</sup> One of the great O Antiphons sung during the week immediately preceding Christmas is “O Key of David.” This text is the origin of the title given to Christ. All the titles can be found in the fuller version of the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”<sup>2</sup>

### Romans 11:33-36

*This is the end of Paul’s discussion of the question of the salvation of the Jews. While this reading gives no hint of its connection to Paul’s anguish over his Jewish brothers and sisters, it is his ultimate conclusion. After grappling with this difficult question at great length, Paul confesses the limits of his intellect. What God has planned is beyond Paul to*

*discern. In the end, the mystery of God and the knowledge of God evoke his wonder and praise for including everyone in the salvation offered by God, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, even though Paul cannot fully understand it.*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways! The correct attitude of man to the designs of God is one of humility. This will lead him to realize that the mysteries of God are obscure to us simply because our mind's capacity is limited. We must avoid saying that "something cannot be just because we cannot understand it."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>34</sup>For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor? This is from Isaiah 40:13.

<sup>35</sup>Or who has given the Lord anything that he may be repaid? Paul is saying that God's greatness is independent of any need or earthly gift.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>36</sup>For from him and through him and for him are all things. The very things which seem to frustrate the plans of God actually serve to forward them!<sup>8</sup> To him be glory forever. Amen This marvelous hymn of praise acknowledges the God who is the creator, sustainer and goal of the universe.<sup>9</sup>

### **Matthew 16:13-20**

*This is one of the most important passages in the gospels for here Jesus is firmly identified as the Messiah, the "anointed one" promised by God as Savior. This is a turning point, for from here on, Jesus speaks more and more of his suffering and death.*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" This is a messianic title that comes from the book of Daniel to designate "one like a man who appears on the clouds before the Ancient of Days and receives a kingdom." This title, used only by Jesus, emphasizes his humanity and his community with other men but it is precisely as Son of Man that Jesus suffers and dies.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>14</sup>They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Some, including Herod Antipas, thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead; Elijah was expected to return to prepare the way for the Lord; Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant and was also a figure of rejection and suffering;<sup>6</sup> and for 400 years the voice of prophecy had been silent so those who spoke of Jesus as "one of the prophets" meant that in him they heard the direct and authentic voice of God.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>15</sup>He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" This teaches us that our discovery of Jesus Christ must be a *personal discovery*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Simon Peter said in reply, Although all the disciples had been addressed, Simon takes it upon himself to act as the spokesman and answer for them all.<sup>19</sup> "You are the Christ, This means the "messiah" or "the anointed one."<sup>13</sup> (CCC 436) the Son of the living God." From the beginning this acknowledgment of Christ's divine sonship will be the center of the apostolic faith.<sup>13</sup> (CCC 442)

<sup>17</sup>Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. The blessing confirms Peter's insight about Jesus as a divine revelation. Peter is the only individual disciple named as a recipient of Jesus' blessing.<sup>12</sup> For flesh and blood This expression refers to the whole human being in weakness and limitation in contrast to the heavenly Father.<sup>12</sup> has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. For nearly twenty centuries the Church has always claimed that her message is from God, not from man, and therefore has divine authority. This claim is the fundamental scandal in the eyes of the world—the rock-hard offense that cannot be compromised. There is nothing she can do about it, for she is not the author of her message and has no author-ity to change it, only to deliver it, to announce it, to

proclaim the good news, the “deposit of faith”. She *interprets* this data, but she does not edit it.<sup>20</sup> Peter has just received a divine revelation! Parallels between Genesis and Jesus’ words suggest that Peter assumes a role in salvation history similar to Abraham’s for they are both blessed by God, both respond with heroic faith, both receive a divine mission, both have their names changed, both are called a “rock” and both are assured a victory over the gate of their enemies.<sup>10</sup>

**18And so I say to you, you are Peter,** Jesus then changed Simon’s name to Peter. In Judaism, only God can change your name, for only God designed your identity and your name in the first place. If an Orthodox Jew legally changed his own name, he would be excommunicated. Jesus’ giving Simon a new name, then, was a claim to divinity.<sup>20</sup> **and upon this rock I will build my church,** Simon says to Jesus, “You are the Messiah” and Jesus replies to Simon, “You are the Rock.” Each names the other. Furthermore, Christ blesses Simon with a three-part blessing in the manner of the Old Testament blessings that a father might give his son: Simon is called “blessed,” he is given a new name “Rock,” and he is given the keys to the kingdom of heaven by the King of the House of David.<sup>14</sup> Stephen K. Ray has pointed out that none of the Church Fathers denied that Peter had a primacy or that there is a Petrine succession. All Christians in the early centuries, even those who learned at the feet of the apostles believed in a primacy of Peter and a primacy of his successors.<sup>16</sup> The use of the word “church” here is a distinction between the assembly of the followers of Jesus and the synagogue.<sup>12</sup> **and the gates of the netherworld** This refers to “Hades” or “Sheol” or “the pit”, the place of the dead which was also thought to be the habitation of evil forces that bring about death and deception. Jesus guarantees that the powers of death and deception will not overcome the Church that is the new Temple built on Peter.<sup>10</sup> **shall not prevail against it.** The most important rock in all of Judaism was the “foundation stone” in the Jerusalem Temple. According to Jewish tradition, this rock served not only as the base of the altar for sacrifice in the Temple, but also was associated with significant moments of salvation history. This rock was believed to be the site of creation and the foundation on which God built the world. It was the place where Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac to Yahweh. David dug down to this rock and made it the foundation for the Temple. And it was believed that this rock plugged up the waters of the abyss, the pit of death, and kept the demonic forces of deception and death sealed down below. Simply put, the Temple was the sacred space where heaven and earth met. To Jews, the Temple was the center of the universe, and the foundation stone was the point of intersection between the spiritual realm and the physical world. Jesus used these images when he referred to Simon as the *rock* upon which he would build his church, and *the gates of death would not prevail against it.*<sup>20</sup>

**19I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.** The keys are symbolic of the king’s power and authority as they are entrusted to his prime minister for a period of time to act for the king in fulfilling the king’s wishes. The king never relinquishes his authority during this period of delegation. At the end of the period of delegation, the king reassumes his total command and authority over the kingdom. Jesus, while still retaining his sovereignty entrusted the keys to the kingdom of heaven to Peter and his successors on earth until the end of time. Peter is thus invested with Christ’s authority as the kingdom’s chief teacher and administrator and through him heaven governs the Church on earth.<sup>15</sup> **Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.** This is part of the Church’s foundation for the teaching of infallibility simply by the fact that since God cannot lie, he cannot validate or dispense any decision in faith or morals that is in error.<sup>15</sup> The Catechism tells us that the power to “bind and loose” connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church. Jesus entrusted this

authority to the Church through the ministry of the apostles in Matthew 18:18 but here he gives the ministry to Peter, in addition to being the ONLY ONE to whom he specifically entrusted the keys of the kingdom.<sup>13</sup> (CCC 553) It was not by personal merit but by Christ's personal choice that Peter emerges as essential to the structure of the Church.<sup>17</sup> Just as in our first reading, the office of Peter is a perpetual office. The position continues even though the occupant changes. Each occupant of the office of Peter is invested with the keys and the responsibility to bind and loose for the entire Church. This is why the popes are called the "successors of Peter."<sup>19</sup>

**20** Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. Although the disciples had grasped the fact that Jesus was God's Messiah, they had not grasped what that meant. They were still thinking in terms of a conquering Messiah, a warrior king, who would sweep the Romans from Palestine and lead Israel to power. If they had preached these ideas, they would have fostered rebellion and revolution.<sup>11</sup>

(1) "Isaiah" by John F. A. Sawyer, (2) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) "The Book Of Isaiah" by M. McNamara, M.S.C., (4) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John DL. McKenzie, S.J., (5) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (6) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Lawrence E. Mick, (7) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (8) "The Navarre Bible: Romans And Galatians," (9) "The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Romans" by John J. Pilch, (10) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (11) "The Gospel of Matthew" by William Barclay, (12) "The Gospel of Matthew" by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (13) "The Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (14) "Bible Basics" by Steve Kellmeyer, (15) "Jesus, Peter & The Keys" by Scott Butler, Norman Dahlgren, and Rev. Mr. David Hess, (16) "Upon This Rock: St. Peter and the Primacy of Rome in Scripture and the Early Church" by Stephen K. Ray, (17) "Fire Of Mercy, Heart Of The Word" by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, (18) "The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets," (19) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, and (20) "You Can Understand The Bible" by Peter Kreeft.

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*