

21st Sunday of the Year A

First Reading 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 Hikiah.

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.

Second Reading 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.

Gospel 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.

Meditation

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!" "You are 'Rock' and on this rock I will build my Church." These are two affirmations which concern the faith of every believer. There is much more here than an exchange of compliments between Jesus the Son of Man and Simon the son of John.

Jesus asks his disciples what people are saying about the identity of the "Son of Man".

Consonant with the popular expectation that the prophet Elijah would return to usher in the messianic Day of the Lord the crowds think perhaps he is Elijah or one of the other prophets, among whom they include John the Baptist. For surely Jesus is a great prophet. He questions his followers again about their own interpretation of him. He is a prophet and more than a prophet.

He does indeed usher in the messianic era because, the Church hears Peter say, he is himself the Messiah – and more than the Messiah. He is "Son of the living God". It is not strange that we should hear from the lips of Peter this faith expression of the newly born Church at the beginning of its history. It is upon Peter's profession of faith that Jesus builds his Church. Through Peter, the man of first fervours, but also the disciple who would deny him, Jesus makes himself known.

He charges Peter with the building up of his brothers and sisters until the coming of the kingdom. The Rock put his mark on the Church just as John, the mystic, or Paul, the missionary, did so in their own ways. The Church is above all the home of us poor believers, caught between faith and doubt, generosity and infidelity, but never the less stuttering with Peter, "I believe."