

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 27, 2017 A

Opening prayer: *God of Creation, you have placed certain persons in roles of authority in our world, Church and homes. Give these brothers and sisters wise and understanding hearts that they may guide us well. Breathe your Holy Spirit upon us as we gather to share life and your Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: Who has been the best authority figure in your life? Why?

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first and third readings speak about the conferral of keys of authority. In the second reading, Paul bows down before the authority of God whose ways are inscrutable and full of wisdom.

If you had not read the commentary prior to your meeting, consider doing so before or after each Scripture reading.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 22:15, 19-23

The prophet Isaiah is delivering God's judgment to a disgraced public official, Shebna, who supports Israel's military alliance with one pagan nation (Egypt) against another (Assyria). The failed alliance is disastrous for Israel, which the prophet attributes to a failure to trust in the Lord alone. Shebna will therefore be removed from his position of trust and honor and a successor named. The Lord promises, "*I will give over to him your authority.... I will place the key of the House of David on Eliakim's shoulder*" (Is 22:21, 22). The basis for conferring this symbolic key of power is of course Eliakim's perceived trust in the Lord God alone.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 138

In this hymn of thanksgiving, the Psalmist, unlike Shebna, places his confidence in God.

SECOND READING: Romans 11:33-36

This is an acclamation of praise to God. Paul's hymn comes at the end of his discussion of Israel's place in God's plan of salvation in light of the Christ-event. Although Paul anguishes over the fact that many Jews have not accepted Christ, he asserts that their slowness to believe has led to the Gentile mission. Ultimately, Jews as well as Gentiles will receive God's mercy. When faced with the unexplainable, unfathomable and unexpected turn of events in human history as it pertains to Jews as well as Gentiles, Paul's only response is awe.

God's riches or fullness, his wisdom and knowledge, are the subject of verse 33. *God's riches*

convey the sense of overflowing abundance of a God whose very being, whose love and fidelity, can neither be contained nor limited. As the Scripture attests, *God's ways* of doing things are often not our ways. One can only respond with awe to God's mysterious ways. *God's knowledge and understanding* surpass all human designs. *God's wisdom* is something we receive as a gift from him.

GOSPEL: Matthew 16:13-20

Jesus vows to confer "*the keys to the kingdom of heaven*" on Peter and his Church (Matt 16:19). This extraordinary promise follows Peter's profession of faith in which he acknowledges Jesus as "*the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" Only here and one other place in the Scriptures does Jesus use the term 'church.' From the context, it is clear that the authority given to Peter (symbolized by the conferral of the keys) is a gift to the community as well, not simply a personal charisma that will end with Peter's death. Peter's profession of faith is recognized as having its source in God, not Peter's personal greatness—"*Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you*" (Matt 16:17). And the divine guarantee of power and authority is linked to the establishment of the Church—"*Upon this rock I will build my church*" (16:18)—and not just to Peter's personal ministry of leadership.

The terms "binding" and "loosing" refer to the Church's prerogative to grant or revoke membership to people. The latter would mainly apply to unrepentant sinners.

We see from this reading, that the primacy of Peter (which each of his successors holds) is not an

invention of the Church. It is something granted by Christ himself. The failures of the popes throughout history do not contradict Jesus' promise that "the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church." Peter himself failed the Lord. In giving authority and primacy to the one who will deny him, Jesus is communicating to us that his Church was not established on human strength, but on his own divine love and faithfulness. The Church's true foundation is Christ himself. The Pope is his servant, not his substitute.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse or image spoke to you most?
2. How would you personally answer Jesus if he asked you, "Who do you say that I am?"
3. Why do you think Pope Francis is so universally loved? What do you like about him most?
4. What are some good uses and bad uses of authority? What one quality do you most look for in a leader?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on these readings. Suggestion: As each of us wields some authority in our homes and communities, spend time thinking about how you use your authority.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for Church and government leaders. Pray that they will always seek and do what is truthful and just. ©

*Be patient with the Church
It is always a community of weak
and imperfect individuals ...
Put yourself at the disposal of the Church ...
The Church needs you ...
You are the future of the Church.*

- St. Pope John Paul II
(speaking to the youth of Switzerland)

Meditation

Look for a moment at the whole great panorama of twenty centuries of the Church. It begins in the wounded side of Christ on Calvary, goes through the "tempering" of Pentecostal fires and comes onward like a burning flood to pass through each ear.... Fresh living water springs up in us and new flames are lit. By virtue of the divine power received from her Founder, the Church is an institution which endures; but even more than an institution, she is a life that is passed on. She sets the seal of unity on all the children of God whom she gathers together.

- Henri de Lubac, S.J.
The Splendor of the Church

Save the Dates!!

**Friday, October 20 Workshop for Priests,
Deacons and Pastoral Staff
Saturday, October 21 Workshop for Pastoral
Facilitators of Small Christian Communities**

Fr. Art Baranowski and Theresa Doyle have worked together for 20 years and bring 50 plus years experience training Pastoral Leaders.

They will present from their new book "Eucharist at the Center: A Parish Structured for Evangelization." Here at Ascension Parish, 2950 N. Harbor City Blvd Melbourne, FL 32935; more info: laurad47@bellsouth.net

Don't miss this truly exciting opportunity!

AND

**Saturday, March 10, 2018
Annual Day of Reflection**

by the Space Coast Alliance of
Small Christian Communities with
Father Dave Pivonka, TOR,
The Wild Goose Is Loose!