

## Bible Study

### Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle A

**Opening Prayer:** (Sign of the Cross) Lord our God, you are the source of all wisdom. Help us to hear your guiding, encouraging voice in the words we read today. Help us to see every situation through your eyes. May our reflections lead us to know you better and to love you more. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### Re-connecting Question

1. Name one big favor that God did for you this week.
2. Who would you name as a modern example of a very good leader?

#### Commentary before the First Reading: Isaiah 22:15, 19-23

Shebna and Eliakim were powerful officials in the court of King Hezekiah of Judah around 700 BC. Shebna used his position of authority to advance his own wealth while disgracing his king. When he was exposed by the prophet Isaiah, Eliakim was promoted from being the king's secretary to being master of the palace, and Shebna was demoted to the position of secretary. The larger point, for Isaiah, is "From where does all authority come?"

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Ultimately, who determines the political positions in Hezekiah's government – Hezekiah, Isaiah, or God?
2. Which 3 items were the symbols of Eliakim's authority?
3. What do you think Isaiah means when he compares Eliakim to the peg that supports a tent?
4. The master of the palace used his set of keys to lock and unlock the gates to the royal palace, determining who had access to the successor of King David and who did not. In what sense is that a position of service more than one of power?
5. Christians call Jesus "the Key of David." What did/does Jesus lock and unlock?

#### Commentary before the Second Reading: Romans 11:33-36

These verses serve as Saint Paul's summary to the previous chapters in which he has discussed the universality of God's salvation. To a faithful Jew, it had been nearly unthinkable that God would include Gentiles in his plans for salvation without their first becoming Jewish. Paul's ode is built around verses 34 and 35, which are a paraphrase of several Old Testament verses from the Books of Wisdom, Job, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. What is the obvious answer to the hypothetical questions in verses 34 and 35?
2. What is the "inscrutable...unsearchable" act of God, to which Saint Paul refers?
3. What are we humans able to give God in payment for our salvation? ("Nothing" is not the right answer.)
4. At which point in the Mass does the priest speak a paraphrase of Romans 11:36? What is the new inscrutable, unsearchable deed for which the priest is praising God at that time?

#### Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Matthew 16:13-20

A Jewish tradition at Jesus' time held that the prophet Elijah would return one day, since Scripture describes him being taken to heaven in a fiery chariot before he actually had died. This return was supposed to happen before the Messiah would come. Peter's response to Jesus' question in today's Gospel reading is so important that it is also told in Mark's and Luke's Gospels. It is central to our understanding of the position of Bishop of Rome, the Pope. It also hints at Jesus' sense of humor; try to catch the pun he uses in this solemn declaration.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Which word or phrase in this reading is, for you, key to being touched by this reading?
2. Does your Bible have a map in the back? Locate Caesarea Philippi and note how far it is from Jesus' home in Capernaum or from Nazareth where he grew up.
3. From where did Peter acquire his knowledge about Jesus' true identity?
4. Regarding verse 20, in their mistaken notion of what the Messiah would do politically, what would many Jews have done if they had heard someone say that Jesus was the Messiah? (Hence, "don't tell.")
5. The word "church" only occurs twice in all of the Gospels, here and in Matthew 18:17. By using it here, what might St. Matthew have been trying to emphasize to his audience, who were mostly Jews?

### **Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives**

1. What does the Pope “lock and unlock” through his position as Bishop of Rome and chief among all successors to the Apostles?
2. In what way is the Pope also a rock for the Church?
3. Discuss how well the images of servant and leader fit together in your thinking?
4. With what sort of authority has God invested you?
5. What kind of leader are you – a servant leader or an authoritarian leader?
6. The Holy Father, bishops and pastors carry a tremendous burden of responsibility for those whom they serve. Try to remember to pray for them every day this week – for their faithfulness, for their endurance, and for their happiness.

### **Closing Prayer**

All-powerful God, your love is unconditional and eternal. All of your actions are just and all of your decisions are perfectly correct. How wise and good you are! Although we will never comprehend fully your ways, we give you glory and praise forever and ever. Amen.” (Sign of the Cross)