



LIVING THE GOSPEL

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 23rd, 2026

Theme: "You are the Christ, the Son of God."

Gathering Prayer

Facilitator: O God, who cause the minds of the faithful to unite in a single purpose, grant your people to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, amid the uncertainties of this world, our hearts may be fixed on that place where true gladness is found. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Matthew 16:13-20

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Gospel Focus

Peter correctly identifies who Jesus is, but Jesus in turn instructs him and the other disciples to tell this to no one, keeping the "messianic secret." At this time, the Twelve are the few privileged recipients of this revelation; for the rest, they must come to know Jesus in the context that he decides. This context is made clear immediately thereafter, as Jesus looks ahead to his own passion, death, and resurrection (we'll hear this passage in next Sunday's gospel). The paschal mystery is to be the lens through which the whole of Jesus' ministry is to be interpreted-the total and public revelation of who Jesus is, his ministry of healing and forgiveness finds its locus in Peter, the "rock." The church's responsibility in communion with the authority of Peter is to proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection and to make him present in the word and sacrament, exercising the ministries of "binding" and "loosing" to shepherd the people of God.

Gospel Reflection

The question Jesus poses in today's gospel is not a pop quiz for the disciples. Since it comes halfway through Matthew's Gospel, at a critical turning point, we might be tempted to think Jesus is giving a kind of midterm exam to see how well the disciples are understanding him to test whether they have what it takes to go the rest of the journey with him. But the scene may also reflect Jesus' own development in understanding his identity and mission.

In contrast to modern Western cultures in which an individual expends energy trying to find a unique identity as a person distinct from other persons, in Jesus' culture, characterized by dyadic personality, a person understood himself or herself only in relationship to the groups in which he or she was embedded: family, clan, nation, and religion. Paul, for example, identifies to be "of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee" (Phil:3:5)

In today's gospel, Jesus seeks out others' perceptions as he solidifies his understanding of himself. The disciples first report that people align Jesus with revered prophetic figures: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah. While there are many parallels between Jesus and these prophets, Matthew clearly distinguishes Jesus from them. He is the "mighty" one "coming after" John (Matt 3:11). And it is John who embodies the returned Elijah (see Matt 11:14; 17:12).

As Jesus presses the disciples for their own response, Peter, the spokesperson for the group, rightly declares, "You are the Christ [*christos*]" (Matt 16:16). The Greek *christos* means "Messiah" or "anointed," a term used in the Old Testament for one who is set apart by God for particular service, such as kings (Ps 2:2; 89:20), priests (Lev 4:3, 5), and prophets (1 Kgs 19:16). That Jesus is *christos* is not a new revelation in Matthew's Gospel (see 1:1, 17, 18, 11:2). But the nature of Jesus' messiahship as entailing suffering and death is articulated for the first time in the ensuing verses (16: 21-27), the gospel for next Sunday.

As Jesus' identity emerges, and solidifies, so too does that of Peter. Verses 17-19 are unique to Matthew, with a wordplay on the name *Petros*, "rock," in Greek. Jesus exalts the emerging rocklike faith of Peter and of the whole community of disciples whose identity is tied up with that of Jesus. Yet in the very next verses, the "rock" will falter when confronted with the stumbling block (*scandalon*, 18:6, 7) of Jesus' passion. Nonetheless, as the gospel progresses, Jesus continues to call him "Peter," enabling him to become what he is named. Just as the disciples' naming Jesus as the "Messiah" and partnering with him in this messianic mission enabled him to all that being the "anointed" one entailed, so too Jesus' identification of the believing community as "rock solid" brought forth that quality in them. Likewise, we are invited to let Jesus and our faith community call forth our deepest identity as followers of the anointed, whose solidity is sure.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Isaiah 22:15, 19-23

¹⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, "Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the household, and say to him: ... ¹⁹ I will thrust you from your office, and you will be cast down from your station. ²⁰ In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, ²¹ and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your girdle on him, and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. ²² And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. ²³ And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house.

Responsorial Reading — Psalms 138:1-3, 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)**

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)**

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)**

Second Reading — Romans 11:33-36

³³ O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

153. When St. Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus declared to him that this revelation did not come "from flesh and blood", but from "my Father who is in heaven".(Mt 16:17; cf. Gal 1:15; Mt 11:25) *Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him.* "Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth.'"(DV 5; cf. DS 377; 3010)

424. Moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit and drawn by the Father, we believe in Jesus and confess: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'(Mt 16:16) On the rock of this faith confessed by St. Peter, Christ built his Church.(Cf. Mt 16:18; St. Leo the Great, Sermo 4 3: PL 54,150 - 152; 51,1: PL 54, 309B; 62, 2: PL 54, 350-351; 83, 3: PL 54, 431-432)

552. Simon Peter holds the first place in the college of the Twelve;(Cf Mk 3:16; 9:2; Lk 24:34; I Cor 15:5) Jesus entrusted a unique mission to him. Through a revelation from the Father, Peter had confessed: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Our Lord then declared to him: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."(Mt 16:18) Christ, the "living Stone",(I Pt 2:4) thus assures his Church, built on Peter, of victory over the powers of death. Because of the faith he confessed Peter will remain the unshakable rock of the Church. His mission will be to keep this faith from every lapse and to strengthen his brothers in it.(Cf. Lk 22:32)

1444. In imparting to his apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church. This ecclesial dimension of their task is expressed most notably in Christ's solemn words to Simon Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."(Mt 16:19; cf. Mt 18:18; 28:16-20) "The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of the apostles united to its head."(LG 22 # 2)

Sharing and Discussion

1. Jesus asks, *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"*

When you look at your own life right now, how would you describe your relationship or familiarity with Jesus? Is He more like a distant historical figure, a teacher, or a close friend?

2. Peter is given a massive role of leadership right after this, yet we know from the Gospels that he also stumbles frequently (even denying Jesus later). How does it comfort you (or challenge you) to know that God builds His Church using flawed, everyday people?

3. Jesus hands Peter the "keys of the kingdom" and speaks of binding and loosing. From a Catholic perspective, how do you view the responsibility of the Church—and your own role within the Body of Christ—in continuing Jesus' mission of mercy and moral guidance on earth?

Closing Prayer

Facilitator: Loving God, you call us to yourself and shower us with blessings. Give us courage when we are fearful, hope when we are isolated, and love when we are lonely. Hear the prayers we lift today and answer them according to your word. We ask this through that same Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Facilitator: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

Looking to deepen your faith and connect with fellow parishioners? Join us for our "Living the Gospel" Bible study and sharing session at the parish. Together, we will reflect on God's Word, grow in faith, and journey together in fellowship.

Every Saturday

Time - 9.30 – 11.00 am

Venue: Level 3, Rm 03-06

All are welcome! For more information, please contact;

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Reflection material available on Parish Website under – (Weekly Bible Sharing - Living the Gospel)

References for the Living the Gospel Reflection:

- 1) Gospel notes taken from the Navarre Bible
- 2) Gospel reflection and Living Liturgy are taken from "Living Liturgy for Sunday and Solemnities" by Order of St Benedict. Published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota. Reprinted with permission.
- 3) CCC references are taken from Catechism of the Catholic Church