

The Dictate of the Heart: 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Isaiah 22:19-23; Psalm 138:1-2,2-3,6,8; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 16:13-20

In every relationship, whether with a friend, a spouse, or a member of a religious community, it is important to know the person more deeply. This is the key to genuine understanding, meaningful friendship, and a deeper appreciation of one another. The same is true of our relationship with the Lord. Our growing relationship with Jesus enables us to know Him more deeply—not merely as someone we believe in, but as the One who becomes personally present and meaningful in our lives.

Today, we celebrate the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A. These three readings we have just heard emphasize the wisdom and knowledge of God, which unfold more fully as we deepen our commitment to the One in whom we place our trust.

In the first reading from the prophet Isaiah, we hear about Eliakim, who was entrusted with responsibility in the house of King Hezekiah. Isaiah presents the importance of placing one's trust in God and acting upon that faith. This is parallel to what happens in today's Gospel when Jesus confronts Peter and invites him to make a personal profession of faith.

In the second reading, St. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, proclaims the wisdom of God and His divine plan of salvation. He acknowledges that God's wisdom is far beyond human understanding and that His plan unfolds according to His own purpose. What was first revealed to Israel ultimately finds its fulfillment in God's plan of salvation offered to all through the New Covenant. Therefore, together, we honor and glorify His holy name.

The Gospel reading is from Matthew. We have heard this story many times, and yet we may still ask ourselves: Do we really understand its message? Jesus questioned all His Apostles, but it was Peter who gave the astonishing answer. His response did not come merely from human understanding; it was revealed to him by the heavenly Father. Together, let us reflect on three important messages:

First, Jesus asks His disciples what people are saying about His identity. The disciples indicate that many people believe Jesus is one of the prophets of Israel. Then Jesus asks His disciples who they believe He is. Simon Peter answers by identifying Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus commends Simon Peter for this profession of faith, indicating that this insight has come from God.

Today, the same question is being posed to us by Jesus: "Who do you say that I am?" This can be a difficult question for many of us to answer, whether privately or before other people. Yet that is exactly what Jesus asks of us every day. If we say that we are Catholic, if we say that we believe in God revealed to us in Jesus Christ, then we must show that faith through our words and actions.

Jesus wants to know where we stand. He asks us not merely what we know about Him, but who He is for us personally.

Second, Peter responds to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” When Jesus tells Peter that this truth was not revealed to him by human beings but by the Father, He continues: “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.”

Peter must have experienced mixed feelings upon receiving such a great responsibility. He was being entrusted with a unique role in the Church, becoming the first among the Apostles and the visible foundation upon which Christ would build His Church on earth. I believe it must have been very humbling for Peter to realize that Jesus was appointing him as a leader, especially coming from his own Master.

Jesus’ choice of Peter reminds me that He does not necessarily call the perfect or the most qualified. He calls those whom He chooses. He sees in people the potential to grow, to embrace change, and to become instruments of His grace. We come to realize that Jesus helps us become who we are meant to be through God’s love and grace. Though we are unworthy, He gives us affirmation and entrusts us with a mission despite our weaknesses and flaws. Jesus already knows us even before we fully understand or commit ourselves to His divine will.

Third, in response to Simon Peter’s profession of faith, Jesus calls him the “rock” upon which He will build His Church. The name Peter, from the Greek Petros, means “rock.” Jesus gives Peter a special authority, symbolized by the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, Peter would play an important role in the early Christian community as a spokesperson and leader.

The “keys” are not meant literally; they symbolize authority and responsibility. This is why the Church traces the Petrine ministry and authority back to the words of Christ to Peter. Perhaps Peter felt honored by this calling, but that honor also carried with it a profound commitment and accountability. In this Gospel, Peter must have begun to see Jesus not only as his Master but also as the One who was willing to guide, form, and mentor him for the mission entrusted to him.

We, too, are called to be witnesses of Jesus. He walks with us, knows us, and understands all our emotions, thoughts, and vulnerabilities. And yet, despite knowing us completely, Jesus continues to call us to participate in His mission. He invites us to become faithful and worthy vessels of His grace, continuing His mission here on earth.

“But who do you say that I am?” This is a question we must answer many times throughout our lifetime. And we answer it not only with our words but, more importantly, through the way we live our lives. The values we embrace, the moral compass by which we navigate our lives, and the justice and charity we strive to practice all reveal our answer to Jesus’ question.

As we celebrate this Eucharist, may we allow our lives to become our answer: Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. You are the One in whom I place my trust, the One whom I follow, and the One to whom I entrust my life.

This is the faith that opens our hearts to the Kingdom of Heaven.

God bless you.

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