

Homily of Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, 2026

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

In the first reading, Shebna, the chief steward of King Hezekiah, was a wicked, deceitful, and proud man. It was said that he conspired with Assyria in an attack against Jerusalem. God sent Isaiah to prophesy his removal from office and to be replaced by Eliakim, a faithful and trustworthy servant of God. Isaiah prophesied God's blessings on Eliakim. He would take over the authority Shebna used to have. "He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the house of Judah. I will place the key of the house of David on his shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut; when he shuts, no one shall open. I will fix him like a peg in a sure spot ..." The first reading reminds us Mary's magnificat, "He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:51-52).

The prophesy about Eliakim was a prophesy about Jesus, "the Christ, the Son of the living God" as Peter professed in today's gospel. God replaced Shebna (the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the lawyers, the scribes, the chief priests, and the old laws) with Jesus the Christ (the new Eliakim), and gave him the authority above all authorities. Jesus, then, passed the authority to Peter and the Catholic Church, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Today's gospel helps us to understand the origin of the Catholic Church and the papacy. Jesus is the founder, and St. Peter is the first pope. It is only the Catholic Church that has Jesus as her founder. Every other Church traces its founder to a human being. The declaration and prophecy of Jesus in today's gospel have kept the Catholic Church going for more than two thousand years of her existence, and the gates of hell have not been able to prevail over her. From her very beginning, as early as the time of the apostles to our generation, the Church has gone through strong wind and storm, earthquake and fire; yet the Church has continued to survive. Jesus' declaration and prophecy concerning the Church stand forever; which is to say, no matter what happens, the Catholic Church will remain till the end of time.

In many countries and in many places, there are rulers and leaders, like Shebna, who are wicked, deceitful, proud, and corrupt, and who conspire against their own people. We pray for the fulfillment of Mary's words on such rulers and leaders.

Like Shebna, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the lawyers, the scribes, the chief priests were equally unfaithful wicked, deceitful, and proud stewards. Jesus challenged them, "they tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them" (Matthew 23:4). I need to ask myself what kind of steward I am. Am I an unfaithful servant like Shebna or am I a faithful and trustworthy servant of God like Eliakim?

Asking his disciples to tell him who people say he is, Jesus teaches us that self-evaluation is an incomplete assessment. People generally lack full access to their own blind spots and possess a limited view of how their behavior impacts others. It is important therefore to have the courage to occasionally ask and hear and listen to unbiased feedback. The problem is that many of us do not have the courage to receive feedback because we are afraid to hear the truth about ourselves. Those who are afraid to receive feedback about themselves remain in their blindness.

There is a commentary on “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by Hans Christian Andersen: *A fairytale of a nude king surrounded by people who could not tell him that he had no clothes. This is exactly how many of us live; walking around with obvious mistakes, bad habits, poor decisions and everyone around pretends that everything is fine. If your friends, your team, or the people close to you can’t correct you, can’t challenge you, and can’t tell you when you’re wrong, then you don’t have a circle. You have an audience. And an audience will clap for you, praise you, and hype you even as you walk straight into destruction ... Sometimes the biggest danger in your life is not your enemy, it’s the people who fear losing your favor so much that they would rather watch you fail silently than guide you honestly.*

Also, asking his disciples to tell him who themselves say he is and Peter’s response teach us that each of us is to have an intimate relationship with him; a relationship not based on crowd mentality but on how Christ-like I am and how Christ-centered I am, revealed through my prayer life and witnessing him to others.

We have come to Jesus, the faithful and humble servant. May we learn faithfulness and humility from him. We have come to Christ, the Son of the living God, who has the key of the house of David on his shoulder. May he open for us that no one shuts. May he shut for us that no one opens. May he fix us like a peg in a sure spot that no one uproots. Amen and amen.

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