

# Our Sunday Readings

ISAIAH 22:19-23  
 PSALM 138:1-3,6,8  
 ROMANS 11:33-36  
 MATTHEW 16:13-20

## Keeper of the Keys

### ISAIAH 22:19-23

#### **Reading closely**

1. For whom is this prophecy given?
2. What will happen to him?
3. How might he feel about what will happen?
4. Why might God have decided against him?
5. What will happen to Eliakim?
6. What are signs of Eliakim's new authority?
7. To whom is Eliakim responsible?
8. What might Eliakim's responsibilities include?
9. If Eliakim heard this prophecy, what might he have thought and felt?

#### **Living the word**

10. What authority and/or responsibilities has God entrusted to you?
11. How do you know what God expects of you?
12. How well are you following through on your responsibilities?

*"I will give you the keys to  
the kingdom of heaven."*

### THE FIRST READING

#### **Cabinet shuffle**

Shebna and Eliakim are mentioned when King Sennacherib of Assyria invades Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18; Is 36). It's not clear what Shebna's failing was. This passage may refer to a reorganization of court officials by the king of Judah.

#### **Master of the palace**

Eliakim will be a steward, someone the king trusts to act on his behalf. His family will share in his prestige (v.23).

- He'll receive garments associated with his new position (v.21)
- The *key placed on his shoulder* may refer to the ceremony by which he's installed in his new office (v.22)
- He'll be a *peg* that holds things together (v.23)
- He'll be as reliable and protective as a *father* for the king, the king's family, and all the people of the kingdom (v.21)

*House of Judah* refers to the tribe of Judah that descended from Abraham. This large tribe settled in southern Israel. King David and his descendants (his *house*) came from this tribe.

**MATTHEW 16:13-20**

**Reading closely**

1. Why does Jesus ask what people are saying?
2. What do people seem to believe about Jesus?
3. What might Jesus have expected his disciples to say about him?
4. Why might Peter have answered on behalf of the disciples?
5. Do you think the disciples agreed or disagreed with Peter's response?
6. What meaning do you associate with each of these titles for Jesus?
7. What qualities did Jesus see in Peter?
8. How might Peter have felt about what Jesus tells him?
9. How might the disciples have reacted?
10. What might Peter have said back to Jesus?
11. Why does Jesus want his identity kept secret?
12. Why does Jesus share his authority?

**Living the word**

13. Why is it necessary to have people in authority in the Church?
14. What new name might Jesus give you?

**THE GOSPEL READING**

**Son of Man**

*Son of Man* is the title Jesus preferred for himself. In the Old Testament *Son of Man* usually refers simply to a human being. In one passage, however, "one like a Son of Man" is given God's authority over heaven and earth (Dn 7:13-14). Jesus fills this title with new meaning.

**Persecuted prophets**

When prompted, the disciples say what others believe about Jesus' identity.

- Maybe Jesus was *John the Baptist* reborn
- Some believed *Elijah* would precede God's own arrival (Mal 3:23)
- Matthew slips the long-suffering *Jeremiah* into the list in order to emphasize how Jesus also suffers
- Jesus is like *the prophets* in that God called all these men to speak in his name

All of these comparisons fall short, so Jesus asks his disciples what they themselves think. They should know much better who he is, given how much time they've spent with him.

**Big profession**

*Messiah* means God's anointed or chosen one, but it doesn't imply a unique relationship with God. *Son of the living God* does. No Jew would have applied such a lofty title to a human being unless inspired by God, the source of life, to do so (v.17).

**The emerging church**

St. Matthew is the only Gospel-writer to use the word *church*. As his community underwent its painful separation from Judaism, they needed a term to distinguish themselves from the Jews.

**Getting a new name**

Jesus saw in Simon Peter the qualities necessary for the future leader of the church he was forming. Jesus adapts the word for *rock* and uses it as a new name. In the Old Testament God frequently gives people new names as a sign of his commitment to them and of the obedience they must give to him.

**Keeper of the keys**

The language of *keys* and *binding and loosing* is essentially about authority. Jewish leaders once held this authority, but Jesus insists that they've misused it (16:12; 23:1f). Because his authority comes from God, Jesus is free to share it with others.

Jesus entrusts Peter with the authority to teach and to judge as the church faces new challenges. God will confirm Peter's decisions, which shows the link between the church and God's kingdom.

**PRAYER**

*traditional prayer for the Pope*

O God,  
the Shepherd and Ruler of all your faithful people,  
mercifully look upon your servant Pope Francis,  
whom you have chosen as the chief shepherd to  
preside over your Church.

We beg you to help him edify,  
both by word and example,  
those over whom he has charge,  
that he may reach everlasting life together with  
the flock entrusted to him.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.