Keeper of the Keys

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.

Our Sunday Readings

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.”

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Matthew 16:13-20

Reading closely
1. What, if anything, does the title Son of Man mean to you?
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. How might the other disciples have answered?
6. What qualities do you think Jesus saw in Peter?
7. How might Peter have felt about what Jesus tells him?
8. How might the other disciples have reacted?
9. What might Peter have said back to Jesus?
10. Why do you think Jesus wants his identity kept secret?

Living the word
11. Why do you think Jesus shares his authority?
12. What relationship does this passage establish between Jesus and the Church?
13. What new name might Jesus give you?

The Gospel Reading

Persecuted prophets
The disciples tell Jesus that people say he is...
• John the Baptist reborn somehow
• Elijah, who would precede God’s own arrival according to Malachi 3:23
• Jeremiah, whose experience of mockery and persecution foreshadows what Jesus will undergo
• one of the prophets whom God also called to speak in his name

None of these comparisons fully captures Jesus’ identity, so Jesus asks his disciples what they themselves think. They should know much better who he is, given the time they’ve spent with him.

Titles
When he spoke about himself, Jesus mostly used the title Son of Man. In the Old Testament Son of Man usually refers simply to a human being, although in one passage “one like a Son of Man” is given God's authority over heaven and earth (Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus probably used the title so that he could fill it with new meaning.

Messiah means God’s anointed or chosen one. Jesus usually avoided that title because it carried certain expectations, like overthrowing the Romans, that Jesus did not come to fulfill.

Jews were strict monotheists. No Jew would have called someone Son of the living God 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.

A new name
Simon was a Jewish name. Jesus adapts the word for rock and uses it as a new name for this disciple. In the Old Testament God gives people new names as a sign of his commitment to them and of their obedience to him.

Authority
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 upholds Peter’s decisions.

Prayer

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.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.