

## Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time – August 27, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

### Scripture Reading: Isaiah 22:19-23

Thus says the Lord to Shebna, master of the palace: "I will thrust you from your office and pull you down from your station. On that day I will summon my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah; I will clothe him with your robe, and gird him with your sash, and give over to him your authority. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. I will place the key of the House of David on Eliakim's 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, to be a place of honor for his family."

### Psalm: Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 6, 8

R. (8bc) 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. Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.

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. Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.

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. Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.

### Scripture Reading: Romans 11:33-36

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor? Or who has given the Lord anything that he may be repaid? For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

### Gospel: Matthew 16:13-20

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, 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 to 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." Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.



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### **INVITATION TO PRAY**

*Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.*

### **Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.**

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

### **INVITATION TO REFLECT**

Jesus is roving and curing people. An odd thing happens in each case. He tells them, "Your faith has saved you." Quite obviously Jesus does the healing, or they wouldn't be asking for cures, so why does he say their faith did it? Why didn't he just say "Go in peace, I have healed you"? Let us seek the answer in Sunday's Gospel. I will tell it as a storyteller might. Jesus is in Caesarea Philippi and the disciples are just back from their mission of preaching. He asks them who people think he is. Maybe he is measuring the faith-status of the regions who have heard of him. The disciples laugh boyishly and give answers they have heard. Here is an approximation of what they said: Believe it or not, some think you are John the Baptist returned from the dead! The ones I talked to said you were the prophet Elijah! It was hilarious! A few of them said you are Jeremiah or one of the other prophets! They just don't know what to make of you. Laughter all around.

But Jesus had thrown a curve ball, and now it crosses the plate. He says abruptly, "And what about you? Who do you say I am?" Eyes wander, laughter becomes coughs, feet scuff. The disciples' faith is still young and perhaps they are confused, not to mention the fact that they have never been required to profess anything out loud. Red faces. Peter is bold (or maybe just enthusiastic). Figuratively, he is walking on water again. He stammers out a very good answer. "You ... you are ... the Christ, the ... the Son of ... You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Silence. And then nods and relief all around. "Simon, how great is your faith," Jesus replies. "Whatever you open with this faith will stay open. Whatever your faith shuts will remain shut, not only here but in heaven.": a high compliment to Peter's tottering belief status. But what does the story tell us? *That Jesus is always seeking a two-way relationship between himself and other people, not just one-way.* Look back and see it.

He wants a mutual love-relationship, in which they open up their hearts and let the Godly lover in. Besides being a charismatic leader or a good friend, he is the very reality of God's love, present in the world, wide open to loving them. He wants them to relate to the fullness of who he is. The name of that openness to God's love on the part of the people is "faith." Maybe you see how this relates to our question from above, "Your faith has saved you"? The people whom Jesus cured had at least a beginning relationship with him. Healing is at last able to take root because Jesus is never just acting on his own, like a mechanic replacing spark plugs: his cures are love being given. But love given must also be love being received. Otherwise love can't get in. So, in fact, it is their faith (openness to God's love) that has in fact saved them. The healing power of Jesus could never get to them unless the openness named "faith" were not within them!

### **INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING**

1. God says he will fix Eliakim like a peg in a sure spot to be a place of honor for his family. This and other metaphors in the First Reading indicate God's support for him. What other qualities or virtues do you look for in Church leadership, besides having a solid faith?
2. Can you see your whole life as a way to worship God? Does your fear ever give way to love?
3. To answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say I am," you have to know him. Which of the following could help you know Jesus: successes, weaknesses, family, flowers, homeless people, music by Vivaldi, Michelangelo's David, a good homily, a good book, good friends, suffering, joy? Can you find (and get to know) God in all things?

### **INVITATION TO ACT**

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

### **CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY**

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

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. Amen