

Homily of Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2023

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 ..." (Isaiah 22:22-23).

The prophecy about Eliakim was, indeed, a prophecy about Jesus, "the Christ, the Son of the living God" as Peter professed. God replaced Shebna (the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Lawyers, the Scribes, the Chief Priests, and the old laws) with Jesus 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" (Matthew 16:18-19).

The gospel of today 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 has 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.

Before his ascension, Jesus authorized the Catholic Church, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

In many countries and in many places, there are rulers and leaders, like Shebna, who are wicked, deceitful, proud, and corrupt, and who conspire and commit atrocities and evil against their own people. St. Paul exclaims in the second reading, "How inscrutable are [God's] judgements and how unsearchable his ways!" (Romans 11:33). We pray that through God's "inscrutable judgement," the wicked rulers' reign of terror will come to an end as it happened to Shebna.

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Jesus asks each one of us who he is in our lives, in our homes, in our businesses, in our workplaces, and so on. It is important to examine our relationship with Jesus often. Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Let us strive to be close to Jesus. Let him be our all in all. Let him be alive in us. Let him have authority over our every situation. When he opens, may no one shut. When he shuts, may no one open. May he fix us like a peg in a sure spot, and may no one uproot us. As we bind on earth, may it be bound in heaven. As we loose on earth, may it be loosed in heaven. Amen and amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP