

ctkAlive! Scripture Study

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020—A Cycle Readings



[Jesus Giving Peter the Keys to the Kingdom](#)

[Pietro Perugino](#)

(1446-1523)

Note: For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, you will find links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Leave the reflection and chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links. Exception: In the course of the lesson, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.

Opening Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

Prayer to Saint Paul the Apostle

Saint Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles,
after persecuting the Church, you became,
by God's grace, a zealous Apostle.

You carried the knowledge of Jesus, our Savior,
beyond Israel's borders.

With joy you endured prison, scourging, stoning,
shipwreck, and all manner of persecutions
culminating in the shedding of your own blood
for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Obtain for us the grace to labor in bringing faith to others
and to accept any trials that may come our way.

Inspire us by your life and letters to share your love for Jesus,

that, after we have finished our course in this life,
we may join you in praising Him in heaven for all eternity.
Amen.

Source: "[The Best Catholic](#)" website

Introduction to the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

An underlying message among this week's scripture readings:
a divine preference for the poor—in spirit, in the social order, and in the eyes of all
who suffer injustice, persecution, maltreatment on the part of those who make
themselves superior by the world's standards.

Isaiah 22: 19-23 “You will be deposed, strong man. . . . On that day, I will summon
my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah.”

The “strong man” mentioned here is Shebna, the palace steward (finance minister).
Palace stewards held a position of power and responsibility. Shebna had too-grand
an image of himself and treated others badly. Isaiah predicts his fall, after which
Eliakim (“my servant”) will replace him

Psalm 138: 1-3, 6, 8 “Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your
hands.”

This psalm is described in the Book of Psalms as “a psalm of thanksgiving to a
faithful God.” What does “faithful” mean here? The psalmist acknowledges Yahweh
as a reliable promise-keeper. By contrast, religious believers, then and now weave
in and out of promises kept and violated. Our hope is that, as we grow in grace, the
weight of our response will grow in deeper fidelity, with less infidelity.

Romans 11: 33-36 “How deep are the riches, the wisdom and knowledge of God!”
Week by week, over the past two months, we have witnessed Paul baring his most
private self to Rome's Jewish and Roman converts. He assures them they can indeed
coexist and worship the Risen Christ in harmony as brothers and sisters.

In this weekend's passage, Paul seems to throw his hands in the air and admit that
all his knowledge and wisdom pale before the unfathomable mystery of the nature
and ways of our God.

Matthew 16: 13-20 “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”
Jesus seems to be asking his disciples to let him know the scuttlebutt among the
Jewish people. Their replies vary: “Elijah,” “John the Baptist,” “Jeremiah,” “one of the
prophets.” His second question contains a zinger: “Fine, but who do you say I am?”
Peter (of course) jumps in, “the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Then, Jesus
surprises the Apostles, by designating the often bungling Peter—the same one
whose courage failed (last week)—as the one to carry the keys of leadership.

A Reading from the Book of Isaiah (22: 19-23)

“You will be deposed, strongman [*Shebna, the king’s finance minister*]. I will hurl you down from where you are. On that day I will summon my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah. I will clothe him with your robe, I will strengthen him with your girdle, I will give him your authority, and he will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the people of Judah. Upon his shoulder I will place the key of the house of David: what he opens, no one shall shut; what he shuts, no one shall open. I will fasten him like a peg in a sure spot, and he will be a seat of honor in the house of his father.”

Personal Reflection

- *With whom do I personally identify among the cast of characters in this passage: Isaiah (God’s prophet), Shebna (the king’s self-serving minister of finance), and Shebna (Yahweh’s chosen replacement)? Explain why (don’t shy away from choosing the good guy).*
- *When I think about a time when I received the key to my own apartment or a new home or a brand new car . . . how would I describe that feeling/experience?*
- *In this reading (and in this week’s Gospel), what is the symbolism of being given a key? How aware am I of having been given a “key” by God for leadership in my family, civic community, and parish? How do I “give back” in response to this honor?*

Antiphon: Psalm 138 (1-3, 6, 8)

A psalm of Thanksgiving to a faithful God

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

I thank you, O Yahweh, with all my heart,
for you have heard the word of my lips.
I sing your praise in the presence of the gods.

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

I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name,
for your love and faithfulness,
for your word, which exceeds everything.

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

You answered me when I called;

you restored my soul and made me strong.
From above, Yahweh watches over the lowly;
from afar, he marks down the haughty.

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

How Yahweh cares for me!
Your kindness, O Yahweh, endures forever.
Forsake not the work of your hands.

Personal Reflection

- *After reading this psalm slowly, line by line, how do I identify with the psalmist's relationship Yahweh God?*
- *If I were to rewrite this psalm what words would I substitute for those of the psalmist? Try it by filling in the blanks below.*

I thank you, O Yahweh, with all my heart,
for you have _____
I sing your praise in the presence of _____
I bow down toward your _____
and give thanks to your name,
for your _____
for your _____, which exceeds everything.
You answered me when I _____
you restored my _____ and made me _____
From above, Yahweh watches over _____
from afar, he _____
How Yahweh cares for me!
Your kindness, O Yahweh, endures forever.
Forsake not the work of your hands.

Second Reading: From St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (11: 33-36)

“How deep are the riches, the wisdom and knowledge of God! His decisions cannot be explained, nor his ways understood! Who has ever known God’s thoughts? Who has ever been his adviser? Who has given him something first, so that God had to repay him? For everything comes from him, has been made by him, and has to return to him. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

Personal Reflection

- *When have I run out of words and ways to think/speak about God's love for me? What do I do when words fail me?*
- *If I prefer to drop the masculine pronouns for God ("him" "his"), how might I rewrite Paul's words in gender-neutral language, without creating tongue twisters? Again, give it a try:*

"How deep are the riches, the wisdom and knowledge of God! ____ decisions cannot be explained, nor ____ ways understood! Who has ever known God's thoughts? Who has ever been ____ adviser? Who has given ____ something first, so that God had to repay ____? For everything comes from ____, has been made by ____ and has to return to _____. To ____ be the glory forever! Amen."

- *How difficult was it? How satisfied am I with my gender-neutral rendition?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Matthew (16: 13-20)

"After that, Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi. He asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'

"They said, 'For some of them, you are John the Baptist; for others Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.'

"Jesus asked them, 'But you, who do you say I am?'

"Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

"Jesus replied, 'It is well for you, Simon Barjona [son-of-Jona], for it is not flesh or blood that has revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And now I say to you: You are Peter; and on this Rock I will build my Church; and never will the powers of death overcome 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 unbind on earth shall be unbound in heaven.' Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ."

Personal Reflection

- *If not Peter, on which apostle would I have chosen to receive the "keys of the kingdom"? Why that one?*
- *Jesus give Peter a nickname, "Rocky." Considering Peter's personality, do I think Rocky fits him? By what name do I think Jesus calls me? Write it here: _____.*

Shelter-in-Place

Some of our fellow Americans—even members of our own Catholic faith

community—throw caution to the wind, seeming to prefer contagion (possibly death) to the current disruption of normal life.

- *What would I say to such a person? How would I say it—in a kind way?*
- *If I prefer to follow a cautionary approach to virus prevention out of concern for others, am I in it for the long haul? How close am I to saying, “Ah, who cares? I’m going to live by my rules not anyone else’s.”*

State governors, school districts, teachers, and parents are edging closer to managing the opening of school. Many districts have decided to “go virtual,” at least until they can be sure that campuses are safe again—for both students and faculty.

- *What decisions have I made about exposing my children to in-person education. How will these decisions affect my family?*

Write about your feelings and your lived experience during your journaling time (below).

Journaling Prompts

What insights have I gained from reflecting on the readings for the 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time and my current social demands and restrictions. Suggested prompt:

- *After reflecting on the readings, what made the deepest impression on me?*

We mustn’t simply be grateful “recipients” of God’s good gifts. We need to be “givers,” too.

- *How will this week’s Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love—and “give back”—during the week ahead?*

For Inspirational Viewing / Listening

Books

Below are two excellent books on the life and ministry of St. Paul.
[I have read both of these books and gave each my own highest rating. AJG]

Paul by N.T. Wright

An excellent and intimate look at Paul’s life by a renowned Scripture scholar and Bishop in the Church of England (also visit him at his other [website](#)).

[Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time](#) by [Sarah Ruden](#)

The author's understanding of the status of women in the first century prompts her to demonstrate how Paul's writings resulted in his erroneous reputation as anti-feminist in our time.

View:

[St. Peter](#) with [Fr. James Martin, S.J.](#) from the video series, "Who Cares About The Saints?"

Song

["Tu Es Petrus"](#) by [Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina](#) (1525 - 1594)

Typically (but not only), this hymn is sung as a pope enters St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, referred to by most as Palestrina, was a contemporary of Renaissance painters [Michelangelo](#), [Rafael](#), and [Pietro Perugino](#) (look again at his painting at top of this reflection).

English lyrics:

"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound also in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will be released also in heaven."

Preview of Next Session

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jeremiah 20: 7-9 "Yahweh, you have seduced me, and I let myself be seduced."

Psalm 63: 2-6, 8-9 "My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God."

Romans 12: 1-2 "Do not let yourselves be shaped by the world where you live."

Matthew 16: 21-27 "What can one gain by winning the whole world, if it means destroying your soul?"

Closing Prayer

O Holy Apostle, Peter,
you are the Rock upon which
Jesus built His Church.
Grant me I pray:
lively faith, firm hope, and burning love,
patience in adversity,

humility in prosperity,
recollection in prayer,
purity of heart,
a right intention in all my works,
diligence in fulfilling the duties of my state of life,
constancy in my resolutions,
resignation to the will of God,
and perseverance in grace to my death.

Help me to be worthy to appear before the
Eternal Shepherd of Souls, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with the Father
and the Holy Spirit, forever.
Amen.

Source: [Prayers to Our Saints](#) website

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

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(follow the link above to the novel *Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words*)