

August 23, 2026—21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dr. Brant Pitre, a well-known scripture scholar, maintains that if something in Catholic teaching seems strange, go back to the Old Testament and find its roots. The Old Testament foreshadows all that was fulfilled by Jesus and helps us understand God's plan for His Church. That is the case in the First Reading which is fulfilled in the Gospel passage this Sunday.

In the Kingdom of David, there was a chief steward, who was second only to the king. He held the keys of the kingdom and was the gatekeeper to the royal presence. Isaiah told us about an unfaithful steward named Shebna. God was going to replace him with a faithful steward named Eliakim. He said **“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.”**

In the Gospel, Jesus uses similar words when He appoints the chief steward for His Kingdom, the apostle Peter. At their very first meeting, Jesus changed the name of Simon to Peter, which means rock. In our Gospel today, Jesus asked that apostles who do you say that I am? This is the question that everyone must answer. Peter, inspired by the Heavenly Father answered: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** Jesus revealed part of the plan for the Kingdom that He was establishing, the Kingdom of His Church. With a play on the name that He gave him, Jesus said: **“You are Peter, and upon this rock (peter) I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”** Jesus was setting up an office in His Church, not for one lifetime, but for all time. The successors of Peter, the popes would take over this office until Jesus returned in glory. He uses language that connects His kingdom to the kingdom of David and the office of chief steward: **“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.”**

Jesus always remains the Head of the Church, the invisible Head, but He established a visible Head to guide the Church on earth. No pope is without sin, but when it comes to teachings on faith and morals, the Holy Spirit will protect his teaching from error. Some of the pope's most important decisions are naming bishops; as hard as he may try, his office doesn't guarantee that those bishops will be a good choice. Even the Holy Spirit must work with the men (and we are all flawed), that are available for important offices in the Church.

The pope doesn't just govern; he must lead us in prayer and the sacramental life of the Church, as well. We have been reflecting on prayer and how to pray for several weeks. Last week we thought about the meaning of praying with the heart. Using Biblical language, the CCC teaches that prayer comes from the heart, which **"is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live. . . . The heart is our hidden center."** We need quiet to pray; we need commitment to pray; we need the Holy Spirit to pray.

I have tried to examine the difference, within myself, between thinking about something and praying. Mental Prayer or meditation means that we use our own words and thoughts to talk to God rather than reading a prayer or saying one that we have memorized. When we quiet ourselves, we start to have a conversation with ourselves, within our thoughts. When my nephew was a little boy, he would sometimes say words out loud, not directed to anyone in particular. He was asked who he was talking to, he replied "I'm talking to myself". That's what we do when we are alone with our thoughts. When we pray, that changes, we are no longer directing our thoughts to ourselves, but we direct them to God who hears our thoughts. I can sense a difference between talking to you in the homily and talking to God in the Eucharistic Prayer; in thinking about a problem and talking to God about it.

Although God wants us to ask Him for the things we need each day and pour out our sorrows and worries to Him—He cares about everything—we shouldn't restrict our prayer to petitions and thinking about our needs. There is a danger that we think only about ourselves when we pray. We should spend time in prayer thinking about the good things of God and praising and thanking Him and seeking His mercy. In other words, we should lift up our hearts to God. You can find many prayers of praise and thanksgiving in the psalms. Sometimes, in my personal prayer, I like to repeat the words from the Gloria: **"We praise You, we bless You, we adore You, we glorify You, we give You thanks for Your great glory."**

In the Second Reading, St. Paul exclaims in joy: **"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!"** I am amazed that the great God wants to hear about my little problems and fears; that He cares about my half-hearted thanks and praise. But He does! His ways are inscrutable, but He knows us completely. Jesus expressed it by saying that the Father knows the number of hairs on your head. He knows you and He loves you. With your faults. We will talk more about prayer next week.