



a Kendall Hunt Company

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Isaiah 22:15, 19-23

Psalms 138:1-2, 2-3, 6, 8

Romans 11:33-36

Matthew 16:13-20

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

RCL Benziger.
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Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word In Liturgy

Isaiah lived at a time when competition among the powers of his day involved Israel in a considerable amount of political and military intrigue. The prophet strongly urged the king (7:4) to rely on Yahweh alone and not to make alliances with any of the pagan nations vying for military dominance. Apparently, Shebna, one of the king's top advisors, counseled the opposite, and when Israel joined Egypt in revolt against Assyria they lost disastrously. In today's passage, Isaiah pronounces God's judgment of condemnation on Shebna and foretells his disgrace and replacement by Eliakim. The oracle speaks powerfully of the trust God will

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place in Eliakim and refers to the “key of the House of David” that he will wield, a familiar—symbol of royal power in the culture of the day. In addition to being an interesting historical narrative, the passage is about the larger issue of stewardship and the responsibility of those in authority for wielding power in accord with God’s will. The Old Testament is filled with stories of leaders who failed to live up to their charge; and, with an equal number of passages expressing hopes and promises of a time to come—the messianic era—when at last the one(s) who lead the people will do so in conformity with the divine plan.

The confession of faith by Peter occupies an important place in all three synoptic gospels. In Matthew, the scene is the culmination of a section in which Jesus has been instructing his disciples on various aspects of God’s reign and their role in it. For a proper understanding of the Petrine ministry within the Church, it is important to see the clear linkage that is made here between this confession of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God and the foundation of Jesus’ “church” (the term is used by Jesus in the gospels only here and at 18:17) on Peter. Faith in Jesus’ identity is not an individual accomplishment of Simon Peter (“No mere man has revealed this to you . . .”); it is a divine gift to the whole community of disciples. Peter’s stewardship has to do with protecting and passing on the faith of an entire community, not some personal insight granted to him alone. The foundations of Vatican II’s teaching on collegiality in relation to the Petrine ministry can be easily discerned in this pivotal passage. The language used as Jesus entrusts the keys to Peter must be read in connection with 18:18, where the same power is given to the entire community.

Catholic Doctrine

Petrine Ministry in the Church

The tradition of the Church upholds that because both St. Peter and St. Paul, two major leaders in the early community of the faithful, were martyred in Rome, the responsibility for continuing to ensure the profession of faith has been handed on to the bishop of the local Church of Rome. Thus, Catholics believe that the charge of shepherding the ever-growing universal Church has passed down from Peter to successive holders of the office of bishop of Rome.



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Peter is understood by the Church as first among equals, a foundational leader. This image—echoes today’s gospel passage where Jesus describes Peter as “rock” (Matthew 16:18). Peter confesses his faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, the anointed Messiah. Paul takes up this same theme immediately after his conversion as he begins his own evangelizing ministry (CCC 442).

This profession that Jesus is Lord and Messiah forms the centerpiece of apostolic faith embodied in the Twelve, in which primacy of place is given to Peter. His mission, therefore, is to ensure that this profession does not waver among the college of the Twelve, that they do not lapse from it, and that they remain strong in it (CCC 552).

Although the bishop who sits in the chair of Peter presides over the entire Church in charity, responsibility for shepherding does not rest with the bishop of Rome alone. Jesus called to himself the Twelve, and this apostolic witness and function in the Church is given to all the bishops of the world who together with their head, the pope, exercise their shepherding office collegially. The Second Vatican Council, however, upheld the primacy of the pope, declaring, “For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, namely, and as pastor of the entire Church, has full, supreme and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered. The order of bishops is the successor to the college of the apostles in their role as teachers and pastors, and in it the apostolic college is perpetuated. Together with their head, the Supreme Pontiff, and never apart from him, they have supreme and full authority over the universal Church; but this power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff” (LG 22).

While the pope exercises supreme authority in the Church, it is important to note that he does not do so as any ordinary leader or ruler in the world. His authority is spiritual, deriving from Christ who is the source of all ministry (CCC 874), and thus the papal office is exercised for the good of the whole body of the Church. The very nature of Church ministry is understood as exercised for service to others (CCC 876) because the Son of God came among us, emptying himself, taking the form of “a slave” (Philippians 2:7). Thus, the pope, as does every bishop, exercises a ministry of service in a threefold way: teaching, sanctifying and governing.



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The Catholic Church deems that the papacy has, as a gift from God, the ability to proclaim—definitively teaching which pertains to faith or morals. This infallibility also characterizes the teaching of all of the bishops together, especially when they are gathered at an ecumenical council (CCC 891). The pope (as does every bishop), through his prayer and preaching, through the celebration of the sacraments, and through his general work, also sanctifies the Church, offering an example of holiness of life that aims us toward the kingdom (CCC 893). The pope, as does every bishop, governs. His governance is described as proper, ordinary (not delegated), and immediate (no intermediary is necessary). But, in exercising this type of power, it must be understood that it confirms and supports the local bishop and that it does not seek to dominate as an autocrat; rather, it seeks to author life and has as its model the Good Shepherd, Christ, who is compassionate and loving (CCC 896).

Finally, the unique contribution of the papal office is best described as a center around which all the local churches gather. Thus, the pope, as successor to Peter, is the concrete expression of unity in the Church. He attempts by witnessing to Jesus and with the help of the Holy Spirit to encourage an atmosphere of love, justice, peace, and holiness throughout the entire ecclesial community.

