

Lectio Divina of the Twenty First Sunday in Ordinary Time A/ August 23/2020

Opening Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit to help us read the Scriptures with the same mind that You read them to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Bible, You helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of Your sentence and death. Thus, the cross that seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection. Create silence in us so that we may listen to Your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May Your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, may experience the force of Your resurrection and witness to others that You are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice and peace. We ask this of You, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed the Father to us and sent us Your Spirit. Amen.

First Reading: A reading from the book of Prophet 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." (The word of the Lord and Thanks be to God)

Commentary: Shebna was an officer in the court of a good and noble King Hezekiah. Shebna was full of himself and he misused his power for his own glory. He immortalized himself and he built a monument for himself even when he was alive. He was ambitious to be remembered and honored even after his death. The Lord was not pleased with his selfishness and so replaced him with Eliakim, a faithful and trustworthy servant.

Responsorial Psalm 138

R. 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.

Second Reading: A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the 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. (The word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God)

Commentary: The second reading is a prayer of praise (known as doxology) to God for the wisdom of his plan. Although God's method and means are beyond our comprehension, He is not autocratic in the use of authority. He governs the universe and our lives in perfect wisdom, justice and love. No one can fully understand the mind of God and None can be His counselor and God owes nothing to us. In the final analysis, all of us are absolutely dependent on Him. He is the source of all things. He is the power to sustain and rule the world. So He deserves our praise.

Gospel Reading: A Reading from the holy gospel According to 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. (The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ).

Reflection: During Jesus' earthly ministry, he time and again revealed his identity not as a political messiah but as a suffering messiah. Towards the end of his earthly life, He wanted to make sure whether his disciples have really understood his identity and leadership legacy. So He asked two questions about his identity. The first question: "What is the public opinion?" The apostles' answer was, "*Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*" The second question: "What is your personal opinion?"

For the first time, Peter representing the other disciples, declared publicly: "*You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God.*" Peter was the first apostle to recognize Jesus publicly as the *Anointed One*. Peter manifested Jesus' true identity as the Christ, the

anointed one of God who came to save the sinners by his death on the cross. Jesus was very much pleased with Peter's answer and gave a blessing upon Peter, "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah!*" Then Jesus confirmed Peter's insight as revelation from God and not any human origin "*Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Heavenly Father*" After this confirmation, Jesus entrusted him with an authority to guide his church as his vicar "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church." From here St. Peter and all the Popes receive authority from Jesus to serve His church as His Vicars. Peter was given the keys in other words 'the authority' to determine who will be admitted and who will be denied access to enter into heaven. This power given to Peter has descended to all the Bishops of Rome throughout all ages, and that it exists today in Pope Francis, who, as the direct successor of Peter, is the head of the Church and the Bishop of Rome.

Personal Application of the Gospel to our life? Matthew 23:9-12 "*Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted*" All who are known as "Father, Master, Rabbi" come under the teaching and authority of God. Authority exists for service. Jesus says this of those in authority: *The greatest among you must be your servant.* In other words, those who have authority are to serve those under them, not "lord it over them." Jesus says in Mark 10:42ff "*You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* Hence, those who have authority have it not for their glory but as a sign of their servitude. The priest who has authority has it to serve his people in teaching, sanctifying, and governing (uniting) them. Parents have authority in order to serve their children by raising them to become the men and women God intends them to be. The police officer has authority to protect and give order to the populace. The teacher has authority in order that he/she may teach the students. Authority is not for its own sake; it is for the sake of others.

What is our understanding about authority as Christians? The word "author" appears in the word "authority." No authority exists unless it is granted by God (Jn 19:11). To the Author, all in *authority* must one day answer. Authority comes from God. Rom 13:1 *Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. It is God who has placed authorities in our lives.* It is true that respect must be earned and not demanded. However the Scripture says in 1 Peter 2:18 "*Slaves, be subject to your masters with all reverence, not only to those who are good and equitable but also to those who are perverse*". And therefore we have to see God in those people who are assigned as our authorities. 'Love the not lovable with the help of our prayer for them. St. Paul tells us in 1 Tim 2:1-3 "*I urge, then, first of*

all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior". We need to pray for those who are in authority like the Pope, bishops, priests (religious authorities), the President and other government officials (civil authorities) because they are responsible for our destiny both now and later on. Remember "As the leader goes, goes the nation." "The fall of the head is the fall of all"

The uniqueness of Jesus' divine authority: He exercised his authority for the spiritual, political and social liberation of the people. He had authority over demons and unclean spirits. He had authority over nature by calming the sea. He had authority over sicknesses and diseases. He demonstrated his authority in his word and healings and that is why people said, "What is this? A new teaching with authority? We read in Mt 28:28 Jesus himself telling us "All authority (exousia) in heaven and on earth was given to me."

Call to Responsible Authority: St. Augustine is known for his servant leadership. On one occasion of his episcopate ordination anniversary, he said to his congregation, "For you I am a bishop and with you I am a Christian". Whoever we are and whatever positions we may hold, we should not forget that our authority is coming from God himself and He has placed us to serve the people responsibly. The best example of Jesus' leadership would be taken from the book of Philippians 2:6-8 "Although Jesus was in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross"

Concluding Prayer: Lord Jesus, Leader of all leaders, You not only exercised your leadership in wisdom and love but also provided for us leaders of wisdom, love and sacrifice like Sts. Peter, Paul, John and James to guide us and lead us in your truth. Give us leaders whose hearts are large enough to match the breadth of our own souls and the soul of the nation. Give us the hearts to choose the leader of good will, godliness and holiness who can guide the nations in the gospel values of love, peace, justice and communal harmony. We pray for the rulers of the nations — Kings, Queens, Presidents, Prime Ministers — all who are in positions of supreme leadership. Give us kind hearts to help them before we criticize them. Give us leaders who trust in You for their leadership, commitment and motivation and self sacrifice. Instill in us the truth that our leaders don't fall from the sky but from the society, families and communities and we are the society as an individual and as a family and as a community. May we and our family members therefore become instruments of peace and harmony and unity to enhance everyone. May Your Divine Authority be a source of inspiration to our human authority. May we walk in your light and leadership