21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 23, 2026

Isaiah 22:19-23 - God will remove Shebna from his office as master of the palace.

Romans 11:33-36 - Paul sings praise to God.

Matthew 16:13-20 - Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Christ and is elevated as the leader of the Church.

The entire gospels generally highlight Peter's preeminence among the disciples. This episode explicitly defines Peter's role. It all happened at Caesarea Philippi, a predominantly Gentle city north of Palestine. This area had lots of shrines and was known for its worship of Greco-Roman gods.

Peter's Confession of Faith – "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God".

Peter recognized Jesus and identified him as the Son of the living God. In this confession, he proclaims the mystery of Christ's divinity as the head and spokesperson of the Church. Here, Peter also sees Jesus as the awaited Messiah-king of Israel.

Question: How did Peter know this fact about Christ?

Answer: According to Jesus, this is a divine revelation made only to Peter.

Christ's elevation of Peter – "Blessed are you, Peter".

In this event, Jesus blesses Peter and elevates him to be the chief patriarch of the new Covenant. Parallels between Genesis and Jesus's words suggest that Peter assumes a role in salvation history similar to Abraham's. Both are blessed by God, both receive a divine mission, both have their names changed, both are called a "rock" (Isaiah 51:1-2), and both are assured a victory over the "gate" of their enemies (Gen 22:17).

This passage serves as the Biblical background for what we call "the Primacy of Peter and successive Popes. The magisterium built upon the Church is instituted by Jesus Christ.

Peter is given a unique role as chief teacher and ruler over the Church.

Peter is the Church's visible head.

Peter's authority is passed on through successors, now on Pope Leo XIV.

Through Peter, Christ himself assures the infallible preservation of the gospel in the church.

Peter has the keys of authority and leadership, but he is not perfect, and still needs to be formed. Right after today's passage, Peter will demonstrate that he still has much to learn. He will misunderstand the Cross and even attempt to prevent Jesus from embracing His Passion.

This should humble all of us. Being entrusted with responsibility does not mean that we have become perfect. Yet, God still works through human imperfections. The Church herself rests ultimately not upon the perfection of her ministers or members, but upon the faithfulness of Christ who says, “I will build my Church.” The Church survives not because human beings are always faithful, but because God is faithful. Isaiah shows us God giving the keys of leadership. Paul reminds us of God's unfathomable wisdom. And the Psalm teaches us to trust His everlasting mercy. When we look at our lives and see our limitations, we should not despair. When we see others' weaknesses, we should not lose hope. When we see difficulties in the Church, we should not conclude that God has abandoned His people. Jesus must become the foundation of our decisions, our relationships, our families, our ministries, and our entire lives. In Him we should live, move, and have our being.

This week we are celebrating our Patron Saint: Pope St. Pius X.

Elected the 257th Pope and reigned between 1903 and 1914.

Even as a Pope, he was proud of his poor, simple, and humble background.

He believed Holy Communion was the shortest and safest way to heaven.

He is often called the “Pope of the Eucharist”.

He encouraged frequent, even daily, reception of Holy Communion.

He lowered the age of First Holy Communion from 12 to 7 (the age of reason).

He simplified the Divine Office (breviary) used daily by the clergy and religious.

He promoted the revival and use of Gregorian chant in sacred liturgy.

He had a soft spot in his heart for children - even as Pope, he would carry candy in his pockets and walk the streets of Rome to encounter and teach children there.

Pope St. Pius X, you renewed the Church and profoundly changed Catholic life; pray for us! Amen.

Peter recognized Christ as the Son of the living God;

I have 3 Questions for our reflection today.

(1) Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of the living God?

(2) Do you really believe?

(3) Do you really, really believe? I do believe also. Amen.