

Sunday, August 23, 2020

21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 22:19-23

2nd Reading: Romans 11:33-36

Responsorial: Psalm 138:1-3, 6,8

Gospel: Matthew 16:13-20

Making Our Homes a House of Prayer

He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (Isaiah 22:21)

Master of the palace: it was a sought-after title, and Shebna knew it. That title gave him far-reaching authority over the king's household and possessions. But he abused that power by taking advantage of perks like the royal chariots and even making a beautiful carved tomb for himself (Isaiah 22:16, 18). That's why God unseated Shebna and established Eliakim in his place. He wanted someone who would exercise that authority with fatherly concern and compassion, not self-promotion, domination, or greed. In other words, the master of the palace should imitate the way God uses his authority: to serve his people.

These words point to something important about God's desires for his kingdom. He wants a kingdom where leaders don't lord their authority over the people in their care. He wants them to show compassion and concern for their people (Matthew 20:25-26).

Jesus gave that type of authority to Peter. Yes, Peter received the "keys to the kingdom" and the power to bind and to loose (Matthew 16:19). But first and foremost, he was to be the rock, the solid foundation upon which the Church would be built. He would not be raised up above all his brothers and sisters; he would be beneath them to support them.

That's the type of leadership God wants parents or anyone in authority to exercise. Godly leaders don't put themselves first. They are not greedy for honor or power. His kingdom is a place where, instead of setting themselves up against one another, his people serve one another with love, respect, and honor.

Shebna's story is a lesson to us, especially those times when we are tempted to take advantage of our position. Peter is a role model too when we are tempted to think leadership equates to tyranny. Let's take their examples and learn how to be good leaders in our families, our workplaces, and our Church.

"Lord, help me to place serving above being served today."

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. The first reading from Isaiah, tells of the Lord's replacement of *Shebna, master of the palace* in Jerusalem with "*Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah*. The Lord goes on to describe Eliakim with these words: "*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.*"
 - What do you think is the significance of the Lord replacing *Shebna* with *Eliakim*, especially the following words? *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.*
 - In what ways do these words remind you of the messianic prophecies regarding Jesus in the Old Testament?
2. The responsorial psalm begins with these words: *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 give thanks to your name, because of your kindness and your truth: When I called, you answered me; you built up strength within me.* The psalm ends with these words: *Your kindness, O LORD, endures forever; forsake not the work of your hands.*
 - How would you describe the reasons for the psalmist to *give thanks* and *sing praise* to the Lord? How would you describe your own reasons to do the same?
 - In asking the Lord not to *forsake the work of his hands*, in what ways is the psalmist suggesting that he is still a work in progress?
 - How would you describe the areas of your life that are still a work in progress, and how can you make yourself more available to the Lord to allow him to do some additional "tweaking" and formation?
3. The second reading opens with these words: *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!* It closes with these words: *For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*
 - How would you describe St. Paul's amazement regarding God's attributes as reflected in his opening words?
 - Do you believe that reflecting on *the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God* makes him more or less approachable to you? Why?
 - How can you include in your prayers some times for reflecting on God's greatness, including his *riches, wisdom, knowledge, judgments, and ways*? Do you think this can help to draw you closer to him?
4. The Gospel reading begins as follows: *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."*
 - How would you answer Jesus' question to his disciples: "*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*"
 - Do you believe your response requires revelation by your *heavenly Father* just as Peter's did? Why?
 - What do you think these words of Jesus mean, *I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven*? (Note: In the first reading, the Lord gives Eliakim the *key of the House of David*.)
5. The meditation is a reflection on the first reading. It reminds us of "why God unseated Shebna and established Eliakim in his place." It includes these reasons: "He wanted someone who would exercise that authority with fatherly concern and compassion, not self-promotion, domination, or greed. In other words, the master of the palace should imitate the way God uses his authority: to serve his people." It ends with these words: "Shebna's story is a lesson to us, especially those times when we are tempted to take advantage of our position. Peter is a role model too when we are tempted to think leadership equates to tyranny. Let's take their examples and learn how to be good leaders in our families, our workplaces, and our Church."
 - Why do you think "Shebna's story is a lesson to us"?
 - In what ways does both Shebna's story in the first reading and Peter's story in the Gospel reading provide us insights into how we are to exercise leadership in our families and elsewhere?

Take some time now to pray and ask the Lord for the grace to be like him in humility and service, especially, as we serve him in our families, Church, and society. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Lord, help me to place serving above being served today."

[Maurice Blumberg is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He is also a current leader of his parish ChristLife, Healing, and Men's Ministries. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]