

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON (or a hymn) Turn your ear, O Lord, and answer me; save the servant who trusts in you, my God. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I cry to you all the day long.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 137)

ANTIPHON: Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.

RESPONSE: Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.

LECTOR: I thank you, Lord, with all my heart, you have heard the words of my mouth. Before the angels I will bless you. I will adore before your holy temple. **R.**

LECTOR: I thank you for your faithfulness and love which excel all we ever knew of you. On the day I called, you answered; you increased the strength of my soul. **R.**

LECTOR: The Lord is high yet he looks on the lowly and the haughty he knows from afar. Your love, O Lord, is eternal, discard not the work of your hands. **R.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION Alleluia, alleluia! You are Peter, the rock on which I will build my Church; the gates of hell will not hold out against it. Alleluia!

COMMUNION ANTIPHON (or a hymn) The earth is replete with the fruits of your work, O Lord; you bring forth bread from the earth and wine to cheer the heart.

Or

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, says the Lord, and I will raise him up on the last day.

TODAY'S READINGS Isaiah 22:19-23; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 16:13-20

NEXT WEEK (22nd Sunday of Year A) Jeremiah 20:7-9; Psalm 62; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 16:21-27

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To rule is to serve



23 August 2026 21st Sunday Year A

Throughout history the question of who shall rule tribe, people or nation has been highly contested. It remains an issue today even in so-called democratic countries where people vote for their leaders and representatives.

Winning elections – whether or not they are judged to be free and fair – is one thing; holding onto power in the face of opposition and possible violence another. Often we see military coups enforcing the abdication of elected leaders; we also hear of rigged elections in various countries.

Commentators point to a worrying trend in today's global politics that favours authoritarian regimes that deny freedom and human rights. If we are tempted to look back in nostalgia to past regimes, a word of caution is in order. Even the great Davidic kingdom of Israel, which reached its heights under King Solomon, fell into a constant change of rulers.

In this week's first reading, Isaiah speaks on behalf of the Lord to dismiss Shebna from high office to replace him with Eliakim. Isaiah has high hopes for Eliakim's rule – "he will be like a father to his people". Yet, Eliakim soon lost popularity and was replaced in turn by his two brothers, Jehoiaquim and Jehoahaz.

Then we come to the gospel where Jesus questions the disciples about his identity. The disciples cite rumours that Jesus is a reincarnated prophet namely John the Baptist, Elijah or Jeremiah. It is Simon Peter who recognises His true identity: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God".

Jesus responds by appointing Peter 'the rock' on which the church is to be built. As Eliakim was given keys of the house of David, so Peter is given keys to the kingdom of heaven!

By the time the gospels are being written – some thirty to seventy years after Jesus' death and resurrection – it is clear to Christians that Jesus had officially commissioned Peter to be the leader of the church, and Peter effectively took on this role for some thirty years prior to being martyred in Rome in 64 CE under Nero.

Some people like playing around with Jesus' use of the word 'rock' to nominate Peter's role in the infant church. Does it mean Jesus thought Peter was a bit thick in line with Marullus in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: "You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things"? Clearly this is not Jesus' reasoning, as he will have been quite aware the Psalms praise God as my 'rock', 'fortress', 'shield' and 'my place of safety' (Ps. 18:2).

Despite Peter's weaknesses – denial of Christ three times and running away from Jesus' crucifixion – God gave him the grace to be dependable, committed and a support for others with their different gifts. Peter's rule was not one of craving or hanging onto power, but the rule of one who eventually learnt from his master that to rule is to serve.

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