

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
23 AUGUST 2026

Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day
Part Two: reflections on the readings
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY
Lectionary: 121

Reading 1 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 Hilkiah;
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."

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 6, 8

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.

Reading 2 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.

Alleluia Matthew 16:18

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church
and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel 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.

PART TWO: REFLECTION ON THE READINGS

I want to say something about the Gospel today that I hope
will be helpful to your faith. But, to do this, I need to work the
soil a little before I can plant the seed.

Some months ago, I had the morning mass here at Saint
Leo's. At communion time, a woman came up to receive the
Blessed Sacrament with her little grandson. He is a
handsome young man, about five years old.

This kid knows the drill: he stood in front of me with looking
very serious, his arms crossed carefully over his chest. I gave
him my usual blessing: the sign of the cross and a short
pronouncement for the child to take to heart.

You're the Body of Christ too.

The boy was wearing a hoodie and, to give him my blessing, I
slipped my hand under the hood and rested it on his head.

All fine.

But the following day, grandma called me and said,

Padre, my grandson wore his hoodie all day.
He didn't want your blessing to escape!

I know what you're thinking. *If only we could keep them
forever just the way they are right now.* But, of course, we

can't do this. So, instead, we need to reflect on how to accompany this little boy as he grows up in the faith.

This brings me to Nadia Boulanger.

Nadia Boulanger taught conducting at the Conservatoire de Musique in Paris for many years. She taught everybody it seems – George Gershwin, Aaron Copeland, Leonard Bernstein – and hundreds of other great musicians.

When asked about her work as a teacher, she famously said,

We must not coddle our students.
We must teach them to love to do what is difficult.

I taught in a classroom for thirty years. Believe me, teaching students to love to do what is difficult is a challenge. But I think Nadia Boulanger got it right. This is exactly what we must do for our young people: we must help them to learn to love to do what is difficult.

Now, finally, let us look at the Gospel.

Today, the Church gives us the story of Peter's famous recognition of Jesus as the Messiah at Caesaria Philippi.

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."

Then, he said to them,

"But who do you say that I am?"

And Peter said in reply,

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

First, Peter recognizes something about his rabbi. Then, Jesus recognizes something about Peter. The Lord says to Peter,

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.
For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you,
but my heavenly Father.

Let me share with you how I interpret these words of Jesus to Peter. In saying that Peter is "blessed," Jesus is recognizing that his rambunctious disciple has entered into what Church calls the *schola fidei* (the "school of faith").

The school of faith is a tough school indeed. It's a tough school because this is where the Lord teaches us to love to do what is difficult.

Faith is difficult. Indeed, Søren Kierkegaard, the great Lutheran thinker, said that faith is "the hardest thing."

Peter will have to learn to do what is difficult. At Caesarea Philippi, he is being called to follow a Messiah who has "no place to lay his head," a Messiah who will eventually suffer and die on a cross. Peter will one day deny that he is a disciple of this man whom he has just recognized as the Messiah, and then he will have to learn the difficult truth that the love of God is greater by far than all our human weakness.

This is the *schola fidei* - the school of faith:

to learn to love to do what is difficult.

And so, I want to offer a prayer for that little boy who came up for his blessing at communion time a while back. I hope his grandma has convinced him to take off his hoodie. I assure you, he can come up for another blessing whenever he wants. I'll be ready.

But let us all recognize that this little boy is now enrolled in the school of faith as well. Like Peter, he will be asked to follow a suffering Messiah. If he is like the rest of us, this little boy will have his share of suffering to bear - and maybe more than his fair share of suffering. This is all part of the school of faith.

And what of us?

Let us resolve to be the Church for this little boy. Let us, with great patience and even greater tenderness, teach this little boy to learn to love to do what is difficult.

PART THREE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR *LECTIO DIVINA*

I suggest that you use the readings and my reflections as an opportunity for practicing *lectio divina* ("divine reading"). This is an ancient spiritual practice that started with the great monks in the Syrian and Egyptian desert back in the early days of the Church. It is really quite simple.

Step one: calm your mind (my Buddhist friends describe the mind as "a mango-tree full of chattering monkeys"). I find that paying attention to your breath for a few minutes is a practical and effective way to do this.

Step two: read the readings slowly and attentively. Savor the words as if you were tasting a great Pinot Noir. Don't rush. You are not looking for information or instructions. You are making friends with a sacred text which will bless you abundantly if you will only open your heart to it and let it speak to you. In *lectio divina*, we are not actually "reading" the Bible. Rather, we are "listening" to the Bible as the sacred words speak to us.

Step three: repeat step two.

Step four: read the homily on the readings.

Step five: Ask yourself a few questions:

- What particular words in the readings call out to me most forcefully?
- What is going on in my life such that these words call to me so forthrightly?
- How am I being asked to change, both interiorly and exteriorly?
- In light of this *lectio divina*, how am I being invited to be of service to the world today?