

HOMILY- 21ST SUNDAY OT – CYCLE A

Today we are invited to think about something we encounter every day: **authority**. Who has it? How do they use it? And perhaps most importantly, what does God expect of those who have been entrusted with it?

In the first reading, Shebna is the “master of the palace,” a powerful official in Jerusalem. But God tells him, “I will thrust you from your office and pull you down from your station.” Shebna seems to have forgotten that his position was not really about him. His authority had become a source of personal importance and privilege rather than a responsibility to the people he was called to serve.

God replaces him with Eliakim. And notice how God describes the kind of leader Eliakim is to be: “He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah.”

God doesn’t say, “He shall be powerful.” He doesn’t say, “He shall be feared.” He says, “**He shall be a father.**”

That tells us something important about leadership in God’s eyes. Authority is supposed to be relational. It is supposed to protect, nurture, guide, and care for others.

Then God gives Eliakim the **key**: “I will place the key of the House of David

on his shoulder.” The key represents authority. But I love that the key is placed on his **shoulder**. A key is not simply a symbol of privilege. It is also a burden of responsibility.

So, here is a question: **What will you do with the key you have been given?**

That question becomes even more powerful when we hear today’s Gospel.

Jesus says to Peter, “I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew is intentionally echoing Isaiah. Peter is given the keys, but not so he can say, “Look how important I am.” The keys are entrusted to him so that he can serve, guide, protect, and care for the community.

Authority in God’s kingdom is ultimately **stewardship**.

We are given three beautiful images of what that stewardship looks like: **a father, a key, and a peg**.

A father is supposed to care for the people entrusted to him. A key represents responsibility—the ability to open and close doors. And a peg is something dependable, something people can lean on when things become uncertain.

Those images challenge every form of leadership that becomes about prestige, control, or protecting one’s own position.

And this isn’t only about priests, pastors, or politicians. We all have some

kind of authority. Parents have it. Teachers have it. Employers have it.

Volunteers have it. Even within our families and friendships, we sometimes hold the key to another person's opportunity, dignity, or belonging.

We can open a door for someone—or close it.

We can make someone feel welcome—or make them feel as though they don't belong.

We can give someone a voice—or silence them.

We can use our position to lift someone up—or use it to protect ourselves.

So perhaps the most important question we are given today is this:

When God gives us a key, are we using it to open doors for others, or to lock others out?

The Gospel reminds us that the keys of the kingdom were never meant to be possessions. They are entrusted gifts. And every gift that God entrusts to us comes with a responsibility.

May we be people who use whatever authority we have not to make ourselves important, but to make others feel safe, valued, heard, and welcomed.

May we become, like Eliakim, a **father to others, a key that opens doors, and a peg in a sure place**—people others can depend upon.

REFLECTION/SHARING

In the kingdom of God, true greatness is never measured by how many people answer to us.

It is measured by how many people are strengthened because we were entrusted with the key.