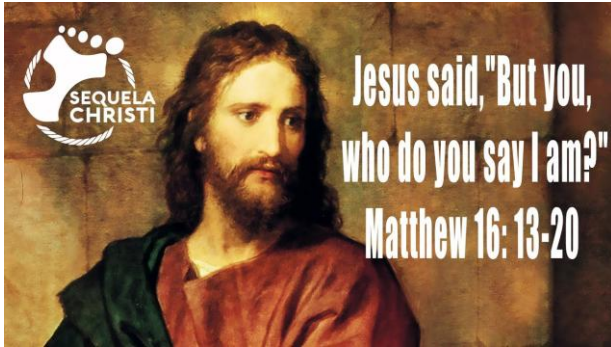


LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

www.orlaghinthecity.ie



TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

23rd August 2026

Matt. 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When Jesus presses the question, “who do you say I am?”, we feel him speaking to us. Naturally, we think of our faith now in the light of our own journey of life and pilgrimage of faith. How did I start out? What was my image of Jesus then and how did I relate to him? Have there been major turning points for me and can I name one or two? How have I deepened my familiarity with Jesus and who is he for me now? If I were to choose an image or a metaphor what would come to mind? If I were to explain to someone what my faith in Jesus is, what words would I use?

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

“But who do you say that I am?” Jesus’ question is not addressed only to his first followers. It is a fundamental question that we must answer whenever we call ourselves Christians. Our first reaction may be to look for a quick, doctrinal answer and recite it routinely: Jesus is the Son of God incarnate, the Redeemer of the world, etc.

Jesus is asking for more than an opinion. He wants to know, especially, about our attitude towards him. Not only in words but in our specific ways of following him. Jesus is asking for a radical choice. Either he is just another historic figure for us, or he is the One who gives ultimate meaning to our existence, provides decisive guidance for our life, and offers us definitive hope.

Thus the question, “who do you say that I am?” takes on new meaning. It is no longer a question about Jesus, but about ourselves. Who am I? In whom do I believe? Where is the North on my compass? What is the essence of my faith?

We can confess Christ out of habit, piety, or discipline but we often go through life without grasping the uniqueness of his life without hearing the newness of his call. We confess him as “Lord” but we live with our back turned on his project, never quite knowing who he was or what he wanted,

Let’s not fool ourselves. Each one of us needs to stand before Jesus, let him look us in the eyes, and hear his words from the depth of our being: Who am I for you, really? We have to answer that question with our lives, not only with beautiful words.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA - *The Way Opened up by Jesus*

The central question of faith in Jesus that was addressed in last week’s gospel is once again to the fore, but it is Peter who is centre stage this time.

Peter’s full reply marks him out as one blessed by God with insight and so he is given his leadership role. However, as we shall soon see, Peter has still much to learn both about himself and about leadership in the church.

SEAN GOAN - *Let the Reader Understand*

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. This marks a turning point in the life of Jesus, and of the disciples. It is the first time that his disciples recognise him as the Messiah. Recall turning points in your own life when you came to some deeper understanding of who Jesus is.
2. "Who do you say that I am?" This is possibly the most important question that Jesus puts to us. In your heart of hearts, how do you answer this question?
3. Jesus praises Peter for his faith and comments that this was not his own doing but a gift of God. Perhaps there have been times when you have been more than usually conscious that faith is a gift. Be thankful for the gift you have received.
4. These are troubled times for the Church and the promise of Jesus that 'the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it' are an encouragement. What helps you to draw strength from this promise of Jesus? What signs of hope do you see in the Church today?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom

This is a difficult passage for us Catholics to meditate on because in our church it is nearly always read with an apologetic purpose - to reinforce (or persuade others of) our faith in the primacy of the Pope. In meditation we go further and discover in the text a message that will help us grow spiritually and experience the work of God in our lives.

Peter is at a stage when he knows he must take a stand on the master he is following. He must answer the question from the truth of himself, not 'who do people say he is?' but 'who do I say he is?' We celebrate the person (it may also be an event, or God himself in a moment of prayer) who brings us to the point where we have to affirm the 'lordship' of Jesus or someone (or cause) in which he is incarnate.

Verses 17-20: Here is another watershed moment in Jesus' life, when he becomes conscious that he has found someone to whom he can hand over his mission. We experience similar moments when, as parents, teachers, friends, leaders of political parties or social movements, we realise with great joy that someone is going to carry on our work.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This story is Matthew's version of Mark 8:27-30. There is a parallel version in Luke 9:18-20 (a typically different reception of the same tradition can be found in John 6:66-68). It is clear across the New Testament that Peter was a key figure in the early church—all four Gospels, the letters of Paul and the Acts of the Apostles assure us of this. The foundation for this role is not simply in the call of Jesus or in resurrection appearances to Peter, but in his confession of Jesus' identity in the scene at Caesarea Philippi. The "Petrine office" of the bishop of Rome finds its theological grounding in vv. 18-19.

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

The sentence about binding and losing is repeated in Matt 18:18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. This may well reflect the emergence of a church structure in the areas around Antioch and Syria associated with Peter and with the writing of this Gospel. This is the only Gospel to use the technical term "assembly" (= church) and it preserves five blocks of unique material about Peter (Matt. 14:28-31; 15:15-20; 16:18-19; 17:24-27; 18:21-22).

While one should not exclude the possibility that Jesus might have thought of building a church in the sense of organising a people in preparation for the imminent end, the reference to the "gates of Hades" not prevailing over the church does seem to suggest a permanence which would go beyond the supposed intentions of the earthly Jesus. The intentions expressed here cohere more closely with those post-resurrectional appearances described previously as "church-founding."

What exactly is meant by the power to bind and loose? These two verbs in combination are found in at least two different contexts in rabbinic literature. Most often they are used in the sense of imposing or removing an obligation by an authoritative decision. These verbs are also used in the sense of imposing or lifting a ban of excommunication. Which meaning is intended in Matt 16:19 and 18:18? Are the meanings identical or are they being used in different ways? A key issue is to what extent 16:19 gives Peter a responsibility that is distinguished from that given to the other disciples. Some have understood Matt 16:19 as representing the first usage; Peter seen as a chief rabbi issuing binding rules in contrast to "the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (16:12), and Matt 18:18 as representing the second usage. Such a view presupposes Matthew's congregation as one which had recently emerged from within Judaism and is now in tension with it.

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA - [www, tarsus.ie](http://www.tarsus.ie)

Today's gospel encourages us to reflect on our Church and its mission. Jesus' reference to 'the keys of the kingdom of heaven' is often interpreted, in Catholic circles at least, as a reference to the origins of the Church (and the papacy). But notice what Jesus asks Peter before he hands over the metaphorical keys: 'But who do you say that I am?' This burning question gets to the heart of the Gospel. The word 'but' is crucial: Jesus is not asking the disciples what they have heard about him from others or what they understand intellectually from their time with him. He is asking them: do you really know me?

Jesus is asking us this question now: But who do you say that I am?" Bring this to meditation. What words flow in response to this question?

When do you experience yourself as full alive and life-giving? What are you passionate about?

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper