

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Confession of faith; teaching authority of the church; royal priesthood rooted in baptism; conversion; service; mystery of the church; reign of God; hierarchy of truths; church structure; leadership; discipleship

## Closing Prayer

Living God,  
you sent your Son among us  
to reveal your wisdom  
and make known your ways.

Increase our faith,  
that we may confess Jesus as your Son,  
take up his work on earth,  
and trust his promise to sustain the Church.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns  
with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers · Ordinary Time 21A<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

## Proper 16

*(Sunday between 21 and 27 August inclusive)*

### Principal Service readings

|                  |                                     |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Isaiah 51.1-6    | Future blessings for God's people   |
| Psalms 138       | Praise for the faithful love of God |
| Romans 12.1-8    | Spiritual worship                   |
| Matthew 16.13-20 | The confession of Peter             |

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *The confession of Peter*

<sup>13</sup>When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' <sup>14</sup>And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' <sup>15</sup>He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>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.' <sup>20</sup>Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Matthew 16.13-20 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

### Comments and Questions

Jesus continues to zig-zag around Galilee, going to Caesarea Philippi, in the far north, out of Herod's jurisdiction. Does Jesus desire some quiet time with his disciples, away from the crowds?

<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Matthew follows and adapts Mark 8.27–9.1. and adds in the confession of Peter (16.16b-19). Most of Matthew's changes to Mark are minor, though he does include Jeremiah to the list of popular guesses about Jesus' identity (16.14), and the assertion that Jesus is 'the Messiah' by Peter (16.20), and, as the passage on, beyond today's reading the direct speech of Peter (16.22), Jesus' calling Peter a stumbling block (16.23), the promise about judgement according to deeds (16.27), and the idea of the son of Man coming in his kingdom (16.28).

By inserting a section into the story as he got it from Mark, about Peter's confession (16.16b-19), Matthew has altered the flow of the story. Whereas in Mark Peter's confession is rejected or at least corrected, in Matthew it serves as the basis of a blessing on Peter by Jesus. The focus on Peter is typical of Matthew.<sup>2</sup> Jesus praises Peter for having a divine revelation about his nature (16.17), calls Peter the foundation of the church (16.18), and gives him a special authority (16.19). The Semitic character of the text here ('Simon bar-Jonah', 'flesh and blood', the pun on Peter's name: 'on this rock ...') indicate that the piece originally circulated in Aramaic not Greek, and perhaps that it comes from a pre-Matthean tradition and has been inserted by Matthew.<sup>3</sup> Where has the tradition of seeing Peter as the pre-eminent disciple come from? Some scholars argue that the Semitic nature of the text indicates an early origin. What is striking is the continued interest in Peter. If he died around A.D. 60 and Matthew was written around A.D. 85, then why the special interest twenty-five years later? Another notable feature of the story is that the revelation to Peter occurs in Caesarea Philippi, which is just north of Mount Hermon, This area is where the divine mysteries were revealed to Enoch:

And I went and sat down upon the waters of Dan – in Dan which is in on the south-west of Hermon – and I read their memorial prayers until I fell asleep, And behold a dream came to me and visions fell upon me.

1 Enoch 13.7-8

<sup>2</sup> See also Matthew 15.15; 17.24-27; 18.21-22.

<sup>3</sup> *The gospel of Matthew* / Daniel J. Harrington. – 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. – Collegeville, Minnesota ; The Liturgical Press, 2007. – 9780-08146-5964-9. – p.250.

The nickname of Peter ('Rocky') for Simon, preceded his role (See Matthew 10.2) of foundation of the church, but the image can be traced back to Isaiah 51.2: 'Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug.' Although Christ is seen as the cornerstone: 'no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 3.11), in Ephesians Paul writes that the household of God is 'built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being himself the cornerstone' (Ephesians 2.20; see also 2 Timothy 2.19).

The notion of the keys of the kingdom can be found in Isaiah's prophecy to Shebna that he would be replaced as chief steward over the royal household by Eliakim: 'I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open' (Isaiah 22.22).

## Quotations

### 1

Be it known to you, my lord, that Simon [Peter], who, for the sake of the true faith, and the most sure foundation of his doctrine, was set apart to be the foundation of the Church, and for this end was by Jesus himself, with his truthful mouth, named Peter, the first fruits of our Lord, the first of the apostles; to whom first the Father revealed the Son; whom the Christ, with good reason, blessed; the called, and elect.

*Letter of Clement to James 2* [A.D. 221]

### 2

[T]he Lord said to Peter, 'On this rock I will build my Church, I have given you the keys of the kingdom of heaven [and] whatever you shall have bound or loosed on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven' [Matt. 16:18–19]. . . . Upon you, he says, I will build my Church; and I will give to you the keys, not to the Church.

*Modesty / Tertullian. 21:9–10* [A.D. 220]