

## Fr James' homily for the Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: Isaiah 22:19-23  
Second Reading: Romans 11:33-36  
Gospel: Matthew 16:13-20



*Ozymandias* by Percy Bysshe Shelley

*I met a traveller from an antique land,  
Who said - "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert... Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;  
And on the pedestal, these words appear:  
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."*

Why is the Prophet Isaiah angry with Shebna, the master of the palace, in the first reading? Well, earlier, we hear that Shebna had built himself a great tomb, like a Pharaoh of Egypt. Built probably on the Mount of Olives as a sort of permanent monument for himself. Shebna seeks to aggrandise himself, rather like the great king Ozymandias in Shelley's famous poem, but just as there is nothing left of Ozymandias but an anonymous ruin, so ironically Shebna is only remembered for Isaiah telling him off, and us hearing about it on Sunday every three years!

All power, all gifts and all authority come from God and only flourish when they are used for his glory and for his purposes. A good question for our regular Examination of Conscience is how are we using the power and resources that lie in our hands? Used well, all power and all resources should bring life to us and into the world.

In the Gospel we hear the familiar, but ever new, confession of Peter. Symbolically Jesus waits until they are in Caesarea Philippi, a new town named for the Emperor and for his local puppet, the powers in the land. Deliberately Jesus wishes to contrast his own real authority to these rivals. By God's grace it is Peter who acknowledges that all power, all authority belong to Jesus. For this, his cooperation with grace, his using his own gifts in the service of God, he becomes the rock and Jesus gives him the Keys of the Kingdom and the core meaning of his Church: the bringing of forgiveness, for this is what truly breathes life into the world.

Jesus builds his cause and his kingdom on this frail cooperation between us and his grace, but promises that such a combination can never be defeated. But, power can be abused and we must be aware that the Shebna in us is never far away and we can end up **not** doing what breathes life into us and into the world, and spending a whole load of energy doing so.

These are good questions always for our prayers, and our Rule of Life: What power do I have, and in what context? Perhaps it seems it is only power over my own will and personal decisions...but it is probably more. How in all that do I cooperate with God's grace? How does my life and every decision I make acknowledge that Christ is King?

Amen.

*Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.*