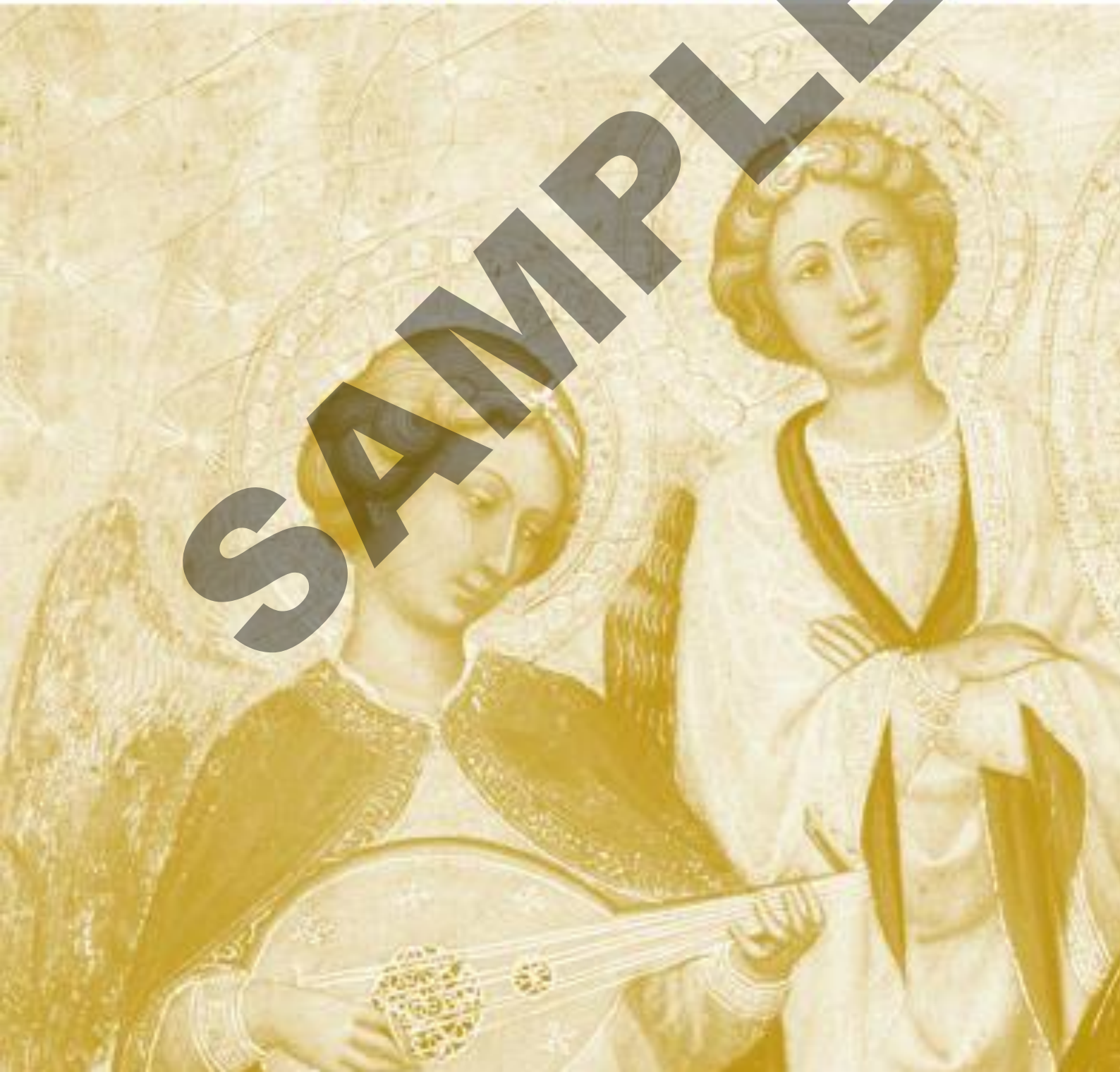


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# The LIVING Word

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time to Christ the King 2023



## 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Introduction

In today's Gospel Jesus asks his disciples the 64,000 dollar question: "Who do you say I am?" It is a question we all have to answer, not superficially as a knee-jerk response to what we have been taught by others but through our hearts and minds and the way we live our lives.

### Penitential Act

We thank the Lord for his faithfulness and love.

Lord, your love is eternal.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, you came to reconcile the world to God.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Lord, have mercy.

### Today's Readings

**First Reading** Isaiah 22:19-23

Should he open, no one shall close; should he close, no one shall open.

**Second Reading** Romans 11:33-36

All that exists comes from the Lord.

**Gospel** Matthew 16:13-20

Peter says to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

### HOMILY

*"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."*

### Illustration

Many saints and other religious figures speak of a moment in their lives when they became aware of what God wanted from them. For Mother Teresa, now St Teresa of Kolkata, this happened on a train journey in India in 1946. As a Loreto nun she had been teaching in India since taking her vows in Ireland, following the inspiration of St Thérèse of Lisieux, the patron saint of missionaries, whose unfulfilled desire had been to work as a missionary. Mother Teresa had chosen Teresa as her religious name in honour of St Thérèse and committed herself to India as her missionary home. The conviction that came to her on her train journey was that she now needed to devote her life to those who were poor by living in India among them. In retrospect she felt she had no choice in making this decision. She could have continued on her journey to the safety of her convent life, but she now felt that this "calling within a calling" was what she must listen to and follow.

The rest of her life was spent in carrying out the vision of how this living and working among those who were poor should be carried out, and by the time she died in 1997 her Missionaries of Charity numbered over four thousand sisters and spread throughout the world. Her own spiritual life was a journey of dryness and darkness, very similar to her inspiration St Thérèse and also St Teresa of Avila. She remained faithful to the end and is

now canonised in recognition of her faithfulness and unceasing dedication to those who were poor.

### **Gospel Teaching**

The disciples of Jesus had many moments of decision-making in their time spent with Jesus. To start with came their spontaneous response to his calling, and at the end there was their betrayal of him before his crucifixion. The moment described in today's Gospel comes halfway through their journey with him. Jesus has talked with them, healed and performed other miracles, and now he turns to them to see what they have learned from their experience. Jesus is talking about the idea of a church and what such a gathering might be, so it makes sense that down through the ages the Church has used this text to affirm the leadership of St Peter and his successors as bishops of Rome.

But the content of the questions and answers is also more personal. To the general question as to what people are saying about Jesus, the disciples select the celebrities from their tradition, Elijah, John the Baptist or Jeremiah the prophet, all of whom are known as announcers of a new age. When Jesus makes the question more personal, it is Peter who makes the leap and is able to declare him to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God". For this leap Jesus confirms Peter as the rock on which he will build his Church. Yet, as we shall see in next week's Gospel, Peter then gets it wrong when Jesus outlines what being the Christ means and calls Peter "Satan" for trying to turn him away from his destiny. How do we deal with this combination of the good and the bad in ourselves?

### **Application**

Neither St Peter nor St Teresa of Kolkata found the paths they had chosen in their moments of illumination easy to follow. As we have observed, St Peter was immediately rebuked by Jesus for misunderstanding the Messianic role and he would eventually follow his master to death by crucifixion. Mother Teresa was attacked by different social groups, whether because of her support of Catholic teaching on abortion and contraception or for her seeming to ignore much modern thinking on medicine and care. She was also troubled by an inner dark night of the soul.

If we follow in their footsteps we too will find ourselves confronted by challenges that come from both outside ourselves, whether personal or social, and from within, the conflicting struggle to decide at times which road is the right one to take. Good spiritual direction and prayer helps. St Peter had St Paul chipping away in his ear from time to time, and Mother Teresa was assiduous in her regular prayer, confession and reception of spiritual direction. Christ does not leave us alone in our pursuit of his will, which will involve challenges to our understanding as well as our strength and commitment.

### **Summary**

1. Mother Teresa had a moment of illumination while travelling that led her to dedicate her life to living and working with the poor people of India and the world.
2. St Peter's moment of illumination, applauded by Jesus, was followed by his misunderstanding of the Messianic role as envisaged by Jesus.
3. In response to our own callings we will find we have to deal with challenges from both outside us and within ourselves.

## **PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL**

### **Celebrant**

We turn to God in prayer for our needs and the needs of all our world.

### **Intercessions**

We pray for the Church: may our Holy Father the Pope, and our bishops, guide us clearly in the ways of Jesus and his kingdom.

We pray for our world: may governments and leaders work selflessly for the good of their people and the world at large.

We pray for all who are seeking to find their way in life: may they find enlightenment and determination in their search.

We pray for all our parishioners who are sick and in need of our prayers: may they be comforted and strengthened in their sufferings.

We pray for all who have died: may they be received into the peace promised them by their loving Lord.

### **Celebrant**

God our Father, listen to our prayers and guide us always on the paths that bring us to you. We ask this through your Son, Christ our Lord.

### **Prayer of Commissioning**

May you, our ministers, tasked with taking the great gift Christ has given us to the sick and housebound members of our community, be blessed as you celebrate his loving presence with them.

### **Final Blessing**

May God strengthen and support you all on your pilgrim journey. And may almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.