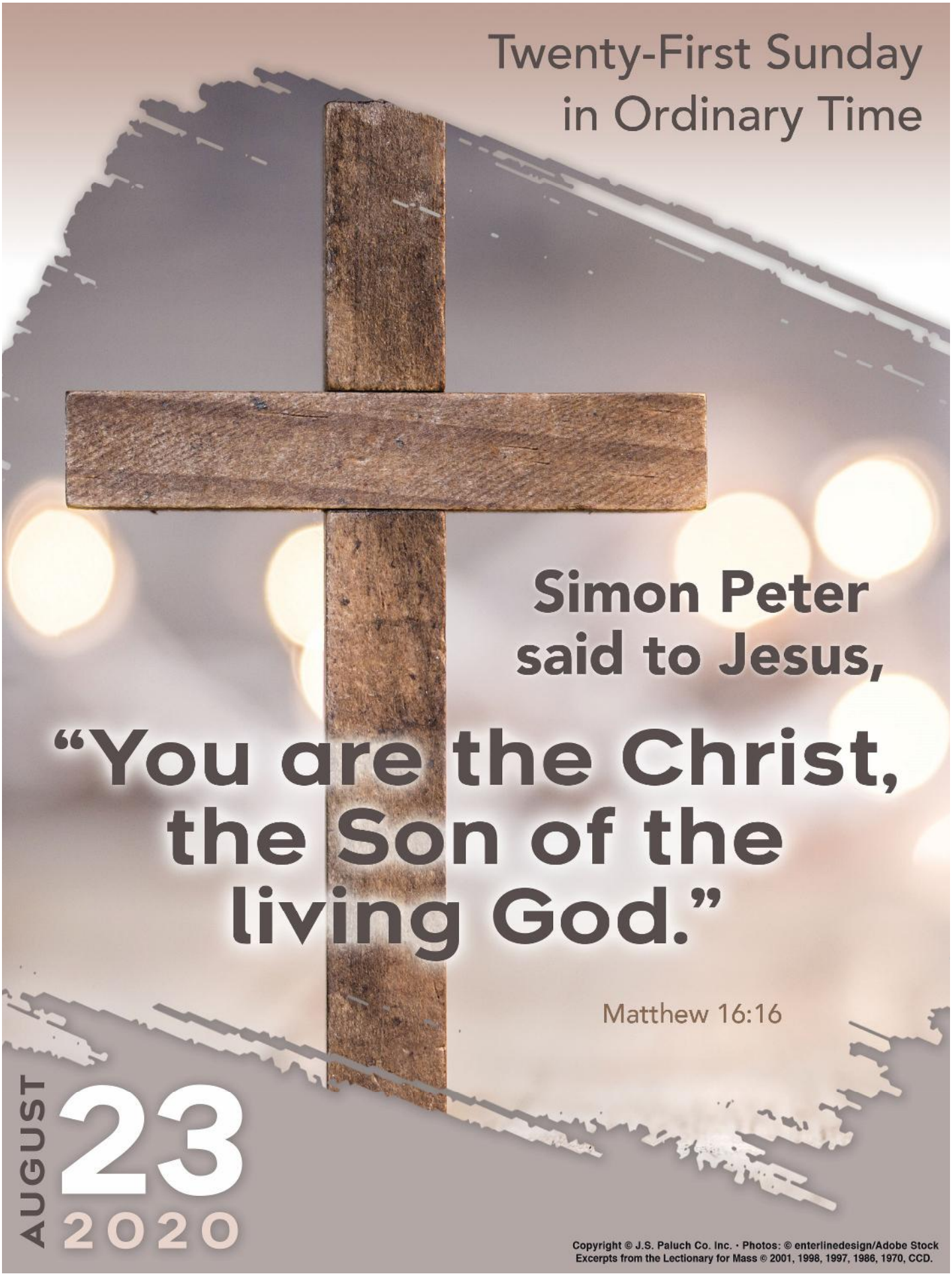

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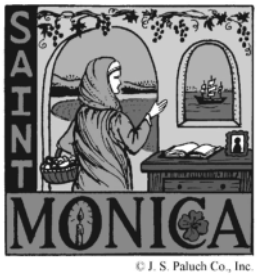
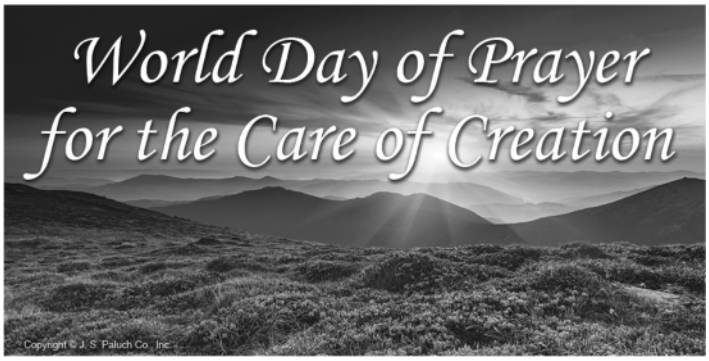
Saint Monica (332-387)



August 27

She had smiles for the neighbors, though her husband found her religion and the charity it inspired annoying. She made tearful prayers in private for a son, outwardly self-assured but, as his mother knew, inwardly restless, and whose girlfriend of a dozen years had borne his child out of wedlock. Though not the first or last such mother and son, Monica and Augustine are the Church's most famous, so we keep their feast days back to back, with Monica's, fittingly, first. To Rome she followed Augustine, then to Milan, where years of prayer—and nagging—finally bore fruit in his conversion by Saint Ambrose. For six months, mother and son enjoyed the blessing of rediscovering each other. Just in time! On the way home to North Africa, Monica took sick and died near Rome. No child who has mourned a parent can read, unmoved, Augustine's tender account, in his Confessions, of Monica's last days. At this time of the year, when parents watch apprehensively as children leave for school, may Monica's perseverance and Augustine's long-prayed-for conversion ease anxiety and kindle hope.

—Peter Scagnelli, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.



Trust

Keys hold great significance for those who carry them. They represent the trust and authority of the owner when given to another person. We may give our house key to a trusted friend to take care of our matters while we are away. We may give keys to someone responsible for maintaining or working in a particular building. Keys to vehicles are given to people who have proven themselves responsible drivers. The readings today focus on this kind of trust—the trust that conveys authority and responsibility. In the first reading, the symbol is specifically that of a key; but the second reading and the Gospel also speak of trust and leadership as they refer to the earthly church that Jesus established.

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Readings for the Week

Monday:	Rv 21:9b-14; Ps 145:10-13, 17-18; Jn 1:45-51
Tuesday:	2 Thes 2:1-3a, 14-17; Ps 96:10-13; Mt 23:23-26
Wednesday:	2 Thes 3:6-10, 16-18; Ps 128:1-2, 4-5; Mt 23:27-32
Thursday:	1 Cor 1:1-9; Ps 145:2-7; Mt 24:42-51
Friday:	1 Cor 1:17-25; Ps 33:1-2, 4-5, 10-11; Mt 25:1-13
Saturday:	1 Cor 1:26-31; Ps 33:12-13, 18-21; Mk 6:17-29
Sunday:	Jer 20:7-9; Ps 63:2-6, 8-9; Rom 12:1-2; Mt 16:21-27

Saints and Special Observances

Sunday:	Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time
Monday:	St. Bartholomew
Tuesday:	St. Louis; St. Joseph Calasanz
Thursday:	St. Monica
Friday:	St. Augustine
Saturday:	The Passion of St. John the Baptist

Today's Readings

First Reading — Eliakim is destined by God to be a father to those who live in Jerusalem (Isaiah 22:19-23).
Psalm — Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands (Psalm 138).
Second Reading — How deep are the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! (Romans 11:33-36).
Gospel — Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Christ" (Matthew 16:13-20).

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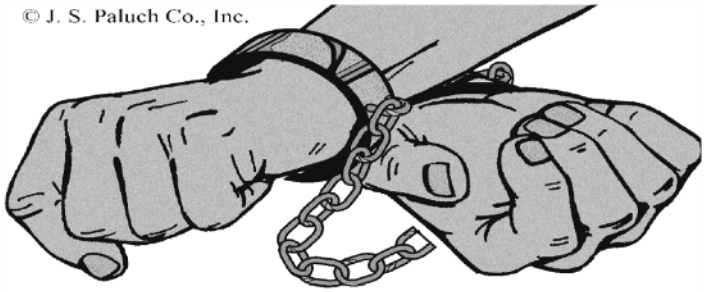

Twenty-first Sunday
In Ordinary Time
August 23, 2020

"Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
—Matthew 16:19

Treasures From Our Tradition

One of the most memorable images from the pontificate of Pope John Paul II is not his shocked expression as he is hit by a bullet, but rather his tender meeting with his assailant, and his forgiveness. It is far more compelling because, although people are struck by bullets every day, true reconciliation is in relatively short supply. An outside observer might list attempting to kill the pope as an unforgiveable sin, but of course we know that forgiveness of sin is woven deeply into our tradition of living as Christ did.

Interestingly enough, the Church took a hard line on these matters early on. Until the second century, people expected Christ's return in the near future, so they deferred judgment to him. Soon, however, bishops began to grant forgiveness for sin after baptism, but only once. What we know as the sacrament of penance takes its life from Jesus' work of reconciliation, but just as scripture shows Jesus forgiving people in one life-changing encounter, so the church granted one chance only. Great sins were the target, such as idolatry, adultery, and murder. Penance was lengthy, difficult, and public, and the bishop was in charge of the process. For the next several weeks, we'll look at subsequent creative and helpful changes in the celebration of this sacrament.

—Rev. James Field, Copyright © J. S. Paluch Co.

Jesus poses the question "But who do you say I am?" in today's Gospel passage. It is a question posed to Peter and the disciples, to Matthew's first readers, and to the Church today. Peter's confession of faith in Jesus as Christ and Son of God was a culmination of what the disciples had experienced in their life with Jesus thus far. Jesus affirms Peter's declaration as a gift from God. But it was only the beginning of Peter's understanding of what these words actually meant, and how the disciples saw themselves in light of this truth. As Jesus and the disciples turned toward Jerusalem and to the cross, the disciples perhaps pondered their own identity, together with their dawning understanding of Jesus' identity. For us, the journey of faith, initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit, means an ongoing reflection upon who Jesus is and who we are.

To Bind And To Loose

When Jesus says to Peter "whatever you bind" or "whatever you loose" in today's Gospel, he describes a distinct power that emerges from Peter's faith in Jesus. The capacity to bind or to loose suggests a new ability, both to restrain or block forces that harm the community of faith, and also to release or liberate energies that strengthen the community.

It might be helpful to observe, within your own parish or faith community, where God might be working now. Perhaps you can see persons and groups working to restrain toxic forces of resentment or fear. You might see those who are releasing new energies, and empowering the faithful to care for their neighbors. When we are grounded in a prayerful trust relationship with Jesus, we can receive this power to participate in God's work, to bind and to loose.

Awe And Praise

In today's passage from Romans, Paul concludes his complex reflections on the Jewish people, the emerging Gentile churches, and God's work among them. Paul has struggled to understand the responses of both the Jewish and Gentile communities, with their mix of acceptance and rejection of Jesus. He warns the Roman church to avoid any sense of superiority over Jews or non-Christian Gentiles, for everyone is in need of God's mercy. Paul acknowledges the limits of his understanding, and gives way to prayers of awe and praise. He concludes by marveling at the limitless mercy of God, whose designs are ultimately mysterious.

Sometimes our own prayer can be like that of Paul. In conversation with God, we try to make sense of life, especially its difficulties. The full truth of what's going on in our lives or in our world eludes us, and so we work humbly with the truth that we can understand. If we believe our mysterious God is indeed trustworthy, we can open our hearts in praise, and allow God to shape our lives.

Today's Readings: Is 22:19–23; Ps 138:1–2, 2–3, 6, 8; Rom 11:33–36; Mt 16:13–20

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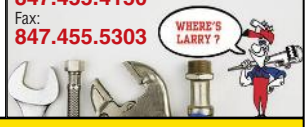

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