

Fr. Emmanuel-Garet Ifeakor
Isaiah 22: 19-23
Romans 11: 33-36
Matthew 16: 13-20

**TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
EPIPHANY CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Louisville KY, USA
August 23, 2026

Theme: The power and authority to bind and loose.

(Singing) “When Jesus says yes, nobody can say no. When Jesus says yes, nobody can say no.” Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven, Jesus commands in today’s gospel reading. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I would invite you to reflect with me on the power and authority to loose and bind. First of all, power and authority are common terms we use every day. We hear them every day. Power and authority indicate the ability of what one can do. Also, power and authority regulate people’s functions in organizations or institutions most often backed by a constitution. Like where you have a constitution, the constitution indicates what the president can do and cannot do. So, it also serves as a checkmate to what people can do. Now, we differentiate between power and authority. Power is the natural or physical ability for somebody to act in a particular way. It is natural for you. For instance, in the evening you want to take a walk, but you don't have the energy to do that. You don't have the power to take a walk. So, that is the physical ability of someone to act in a particular way. Authority goes beyond power. Power and authority are not the same because you may have power to do something, but you don't have the authority to do that. It is called a faculty granted to you so that you can rightly exercise your power.

Hence, Jesus Christ has said earlier in Matthew 28:18, that “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”. So, power and authority are located in Christ. Today in the first reading we saw the prophecy of Isaiah about somebody who was acting without authority. He is called Shebna. Isaiah prophesied, “Thus says the Lord to Shebna, master of the palace.” I will thrust you from your office and pull you down from your station”. This is because he was an official that was acting without authority. God said, when I unsit you, when I disgrace you, I will raise Eliakim on your thrown. I will give him power and authority to rule my people; “On that day I will summon my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah; I will

clothe him with your robe, and gird him with your sash, and give over to him your authority". Continuing, "I will place the key to the House of David on Eliakim's shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut when he shuts, no one shall open." This reminds us that the power and authority of Christ is final, absolute, and ultimate.

The second reading talks about the wisdom, knowledge, and the riches of Christ. They are so deep and profound. It says judgment of God is inscrutable. The judgment of God is fair, but at times it is difficult for us to figure it out. That will bring God to the gospel where Jesus was asking the people, who do you say I am? Now, let us understand the gospel. This is when Jesus was in the world. When His identity was in doubt to some people. However, all of us here, have been taught who Christ is. So, when we ask you now, who do you say Christ is? You don't begin to say Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets because we have been taught who Christ is. But the bottom line is what you were taught Christ is, do you believe in it? That is the profession of faith which Peter made in the gospel. He said that you are this Christ, the Son of the living God. Going down, Jesus said to Peter, "you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it." Going further, He said, "I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven". Now, here, I want to talk about sacramental Confession because this particular verse is linked to John 20: 23 where Christ, after the Resurrection, said to the apostles, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

My dear people of God, at times people confuse you, James 5:16 where it is said, confess your sins to one another. This talks about sharing your mistakes and your struggles with one another. But it is not a sacramental Confession. What is sacramental Confession? Sacramental Confession is the sacrament instituted by Christ for the forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism. Through the priest, God grants mercy and reconciliation with the Church. Thus, when I resolve to go to confess my sin because I want God to forgive me my sin because it is only God who can forgive sins. This brings restoration and not humiliation. At times, because of shame and guilt; we used to withdraw from this. But look at what Christ is saying today; "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven". Now, to explain to you further what I meant by power and authority. After the ordination of a catholic priest, he has what is called the power of orders (*potestas ordinis*). However, the authorization to hear sacramental confessions comes afterwards. This authority does not automatically come solely from the act of ordination itself. This is a

faculty granted by a competent authority, such as a diocesan bishop. This is the faculty to exercise the power he has received in ordination. So, when you request confessions from a newly ordained person, he will tell you, I don't yet have the faculty to hear sacramental Confessions. Keep in mind that a priest in the confessional represent God because only God can forgive sins. He is acting in the person of Christ. When the priest says the words of absolution at the end, "God, the Father of mercies, through the death and the Resurrection of His Son, he has reconciled the world to Himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." He does it in the name of God. Father Emmanuel doesn't forgive sin. It is God who forgives sins.

In talking about the power and authority, it is good to remind us that human power has limit. But some people, at times, try to exceed their limit. Some people might be threatened by their boss in their job. You might even lose your job because your boss has the power to terminate it. But he/she doesn't have the authority for you not to get a new job. That is where Christ comes in. I often remind people that others may speak discouraging words—whether a husband, wife, doctor, or boss—but Christ has the final word. That is why I sang. "When Jesus says yes, nobody can say no." In the first reading, it is written, "when He opens, no one shall shut, when He shuts, no one shall open." I want to request you at this Mass to join me to ask God for the wisdom and understanding to know that everything finally rests on God. That is the conclusion of the second reading, "For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen". Power and authority to loose and bind. (singing) "When Jesus says yes, nobody can say no. When Jesus says yes, nobody can say no."