

# Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2026

## Bible Readings

### Romans 12:1–8 NRSV

[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. [3] For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. [4] For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, [5] so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. [6] We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; [7] ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; [8] the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

### Matthew 16:13–20 NRSV

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

## Questions

1. What does Paul mean by presenting our bodies as a "living sacrifice" in Romans 12:1?
2. Why does Paul describe this offering as our "spiritual worship"?
3. What does Paul mean by "Do not be conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2)?
4. How are Christians "transformed by the renewing of your minds"?
5. What does Romans 12:3–8 teach about spiritual gifts?

6. Why does Jesus ask the disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13)?
7. Why is Peter's answer, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” so important?
8. What does Jesus mean when he tells Peter that “flesh and blood” did not reveal this to him?
9. What does Jesus mean by the “rock,” the Church, and the “keys of the kingdom” in Matthew 16:18–19?
10. What is the main theological connection between Romans 12 and Matthew 16?

Extra:

- Q11. What is the relationship between God's grace and the transformation of the Christian life?
- Q12. What does Matthew 16:18–19 teach about the nature and authority of the Church?
- Q13. How does Paul's image of “one body” challenge individualistic understandings of Christian faith?

## **Reflection: Who Do You Say That I Am?**

***Romans 12:1–8 and Matthew 16:13–20***

At the centre of Matthew 16 is one of the most important questions Jesus ever asks his disciples: **“But who do you say that I am?”**

Peter answers: **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

Peter has recognised something extraordinary about Jesus. He is not simply a teacher, prophet or miracle-worker. He is the promised Messiah, the Son of God. But recognising who Jesus is raises another question: If this is what we believe about Jesus, what difference should it make to the way we live?

Romans 12 helps us answer that question. Paul begins by encouraging Christians to present themselves to God as a **“living sacrifice.”** In the past, sacrifices were placed upon an altar. Paul now says that our whole lives should be offered to God. Our worship, therefore, is not limited to what happens on Sunday. We worship God through the way we live on Monday morning, through our relationships, our work, our generosity, our forgiveness and our service to others.

Paul then says: **“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”**

Following Jesus involves transformation. There will always be pressures encouraging us to think and behave in particular ways. Success, possessions, status and self-interest can easily become the things by which we measure our lives. Paul invites us to see things differently. Through prayer, Scripture, worship and the work of the Holy Spirit, God gradually changes the way we think. Instead of asking only, **“What do I want?”**, we begin to ask, **“What does God want me to become?”**

This transformation also changes how we see other people. Paul describes the Church as one body with many members. We do not all have the same gifts, personalities or responsibilities. Some teach. Some encourage. Some lead. Some give generously. Others quietly serve and show compassion. No gift makes one person more important than another. This connects beautifully with Jesus' words: **“I will build my church.”**

The Church belongs to Christ. Yet Christ chooses to build it through ordinary people like Peter—and through ordinary people like us. Peter was far from perfect. He sometimes misunderstood Jesus, acted impulsively and later denied knowing him. Yet Jesus still called and used him. That should encourage us. God does not wait until we are perfect before he gives us something to do.

The question is whether we are willing to offer what we have. Perhaps the connection between these readings can be expressed simply:

- We recognise who Jesus is.
- We offer ourselves to him.
- He transforms us.
- We use our gifts to serve others.
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Peter's confession therefore becomes our question: **“Who do you say that I am?”**

Our answer is given not only through the words we speak in church but through the lives we live when we leave it. If Jesus really is **“the Messiah, the Son of the living God,”** then following him should gradually transform everything.

### **Questions for Personal Reflection**

1. If I truly believe that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” what difference is that making to the way I live each day?
2. Where might I be conforming to the values of the world when God is calling me to allow my mind and priorities to be transformed?
3. What gifts has God given me, and how could I use them more fully to serve other people and help build up Christ's Church?