

## 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday (B)

- 'But you, who do you say I am?' - this would have to be one of the most powerful questions of the gospels.
- It echoes down the centuries & is just as relevant today as it ever was.
- 'Who do you say I am?'
- Our answer to that question is perhaps the most revealing statement of our faith.
- Our answer no doubt changes over time as we grow in understanding & as we experience the ups & downs of life, but nonetheless, just like Peter in the gospel passage, our answer remains a clear statement of our faith.
- 'Who do you say I am?' Just a good guy who lived 2,000 years ago? A role model? A friend? God made flesh? The Word come down from heaven? Nobody? Everybody? Our saviour? An inspired man of God? The Messiah?
- Some scholars refer to Mark's Gospel as 'The Gospel of Failed Discipleship' – it is 16 chapters long & half-way through the gospel, in chapter 8, we have today's gospel with Jesus asking the question of whether they know who he is after all this time being with them.
- Peter answers, but he clearly doesn't still understand, & that's why Jesus refers to him as an obstacle in his path.
- In fact, in Mark's gospel, the one who answers most correctly is the Roman centurion when Jesus dies on the cross, & he declares – "In truth this man was God's son."
- Like Peter in today's Gospel, we declare our faith in Jesus; we do so every time we come to the Eucharist, but perhaps also like Peter, we don't fully understand what this declaration of faith really entails.
- If we did, maybe we wouldn't declare it so easily; or maybe we just declare faith without doing anything of significance because of it.
- What Jesus says with regard to our having faith has nothing to do with it being easy, cozy or comforting; it is hard & demanding, costly & scary.
- Suffering, rejection, self-denial, self-sacrifice, giving up our security, losing our very selves in the service of the gospel for the sake of others – these aren't merely metaphors or poetic figures of speech; they are real, as borne out in the real-life actuality of Jesus himself.
- Jesus says that real faith in him means one seeks absolutely nothing for oneself – neither reward nor salvation; nothing like saving one's soul or getting to heaven or storing up merit or becoming holy.
- In fact, to the extent that one seeks these things, one will surely never find them.
- This is what Jesus means when he says, "Whoever would save one's life will lose it."

- And then Jesus continues this central Christian paradox by saying, "But whoever loses one's life for my sake & that of the gospel (for the sake of others) will save it."
- Jesus isn't saying that this is so only if one dies for the sake of others, but rather he says that one lives life not primarily for one's own benefit, but for the good of others; that the needs of others are placed before our own; that religion isn't intended for our own private, individual, spiritual well-being, but to empower us to work for the good of others, especially those in greatest need; to live a life that is a public declaration against all that is wrong & unjust in the world; to live a life that is an active choice for the poor & oppressed; to seek not our own holiness, but justice for all.
- Simply – that one lives a life of service - & that involves accepting whatever comes as a consequence of this witnessing faith-life – as Jesus did.
- In this way Jesus says that service of others & our own holiness become one & the same thing.
- Hearts that are poured out, spent, emptied in service of others is what the Gospel asks of us because it is only in this way that we individually & as a community of the followers of Jesus continue his mission & project of furthering God's plan, God's kingdom - & only in that way can we be inheritors of it.
- You can't avoid it – today's Gospel tells us in no uncertain terms that gain or profit or benefit for ourselves, spiritual or heavenly, is not the motivation of a real Christian life – that it is in losing our lives for the sake of others that we find life.
- So, can we claim to understand Jesus? Or are we more like the people in James' community: people who profess faith in Jesus, but who do not live it out; people who speak pleasant words to others, who say the right things, but who do not back up their words with good works?
- This applies to each of us individually & as a church in the world, especially as challenged by the Royal Commission – our equivalent today of the challenge that James put to his community.
- Is our faith really living?