

21st Sunday (A)

- Picture the scene of today's Gospel: Jesus has been leading & teaching his disciples for almost 3 years & he is interested in whether his message has really touched their hearts – do those who are closest to him really understand what he is about; have they come to know who he truly is?
- So he asks the question – “Who do people say I am?”
- The disciples give back to him what they have heard others say about him, but he then arrives at what he really wants to know – “but **you**, who have been with me all this time – who do YOU say I am?”
- The disciples, reflecting on their experiences with Jesus, offer various possibilities, but it is Peter who says that Jesus is the revelation of God for the world - this is the great profession of faith & the basis on which the Church comes into being.
- Peter is the one who replies, saying – “You are the Christ, the anointed one of God, the very Son of the living God”.
- And this answer is not something he has learnt from the Catechism or RE lessons, it's a conviction of the heart, deriving from an intimate love & knowledge of him & a conviction he'd be prepared to die for.
- It is we who 2,000 years later still express as a statement of our belief, but Peter was the first to declare it.
- And Jesus' question – “Who do YOU say that I am?” – still demands an answer - from us – he asks **us** the same question.
- And what was true then for Peter, is true now for us.
- At some point, if we want our faith to move from being a code of law, a concept, or some excellent ideas to something we can experience, we must take the faith of the Church, which has nurtured us up to now, & make it our own.
- In doing so, when we encounter Christ, we contribute to the re-founding of the Church in our own generation.
- Just being part of the 'Catholic crowd' is hardly the challenge Jesus presents to the disciples in today's Gospel.
- We don't all have the same image of Jesus, not only because of his inexhaustible personality, but because each of us has a personal image of Jesus based on our own interests & concerns, conditioned by our personal psychology & backgrounds & the religious formation we've received, & yet each one's image of Jesus has a decisive importance for that person's life, because it shapes our way of understanding & living our faith.
- And if we are in relationship with Jesus, our image necessarily has to be different from what it was last year or 10 years ago & the way we'd specifically answer that question should develop as we grow closer to him.
- So how would you answer Jesus' question?

- You see, the answer we give says everything about us, our answer isn't a declaration of who Jesus is in himself & if we just give a stock standard answer that the church may give, or if our answer hasn't changed from what we've learnt in school, for those of us who are older, & our childish ideas of Jesus have remained because we've never allowed him to answer the more serious questions that we ask as we grow older, or if it's a distorted answer, it means that our faith has not matured.
- Unfortunately, many Christians understand & live their religion in such a way that they will probably never have a living experience of personal encounter with Jesus.
- Many Christians did not go on to rethink their faith in Jesus Christ, either because they considered it trivial & unimportant for their lives, or because they were afraid to examine it seriously because it might change them, or because for them it was enough to hold on to it in an indifferent way that never changes their lives, so they have kept Jesus distant, maybe knowing much about him, but not experiencing him.
- Knowing things about Jesus doesn't make us real Christian, it is about being in relationship with him.
- And that relationship can grow & develop if we are open to encountering him in the everyday experiences & our interactions with people.
- Jesus is there, & often in the turmoil we endure in life.
- He reaches out to us & asks us to invite him in.
- If we miss those opportunities of encounter, then our relationship cannot develop.
- This is fundamental because our relationship with Jesus, & the way we answer that question determines the face of Christ we show to others.
- We are commissioned like the disciples to bear witness to Christ's personal love in the workplace, with our friends & in our families.
- It's always helpful to be reminded that we might be the only face of Catholicism, or even Christianity, that another person may encounter.
- The way in which we bind them up or set them free might be the measure by which they judge if the Church is the face of Christ in today's world & whether they could find a home with us.
- And it all hinges on that great question which is asked of each of us today: 'Who do you say that I am?'
- How we answer that question reflects our relationship with Jesus.
- But more importantly, how we answer that question reflects the way we live our life in response to who we believe Jesus to be.
- If we truly say that we believe in Jesus as the son of God, then how do we live our lives in such a way that we act on that belief?
- The gospel shows us that an inadequate answer to that question leads to missing the point of all that Jesus is & the intimate relationship he invites us into.