

27 August 2017 (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

Isaiah 22:19-23; Psalm 137(138):1-3,6,8; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 16:13-20.

Who do you say I am?

Who is Jesus? As we read through the gospel narratives Sunday after Sunday, with the disciples we slowly develop a greater understanding of who Jesus really is. Over a period of three years we read most of the gospels, but each time we read the same narratives we are invited to go deeper into our understanding and our personal relationship with Jesus.

In today's gospel reading Jesus wanted to test the disciples' understanding; have they started to understand who he really was? Many of Jesus' contemporaries were waiting for a messiah chosen by God to save them from their Roman oppressors, not unlike the stories they read about in their scriptures. They knew about Moses who had saved their ancestors from Egypt, and the judges and kings who saved them from surrounding peoples. The Zealots were trying to organise a revolt against the Romans. Where did they disciples stand?

Jesus asks two very pertinent questions: who do the people think that I am? And, more importantly, who do the disciples believe he is? To be a Christian is to believe in the person of Jesus. One cannot be a Christian without getting into a deep personal relationship with this person. Today we need to hear Jesus ask us the same two questions: who does the world say Jesus is? Does the world today think Jesus is relevant, or has he been relegated to the history books? We have been baptised, immersed in the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection, who do I say Jesus is? What do I believe about Jesus? Am I really ready to give my whole life to Jesus?

Peter answers in the name of the others: you are the Messiah, the anointed one, and you are the Son of the living God, the God of the scriptures. Peter puts side by side the expectations of his contemporaries in a saving messiah, and some of the things Jesus has been saying about himself. Jesus in turn praises Peter, because he has been blessed by God who helped him see who Jesus really is. In fact Jesus, the Son of God, is truly the Messiah, because he saved us, his people, from the greatest slavery of all, sin.

Did Peter really understand the implication of what he had just said? Do we understand what it means to be the followers of the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of the living God? Last week we spoke about prayer as being the time we choose to set aside in order to be able to enter into conversation with God. It is in prayer that we really get to understand who Jesus really is. In our prayer we continually respond to the question: who do you say I am? It is not enough to repeat the answer the world gives; nor is it enough to simply reiterate what the Church teaches. As a true disciple I need to be able to make up my mind about the person of Jesus and declare who I really believe he is.

Jesus told Peter that it was the Father who had shown him who Jesus was. It is in prayerful meditation and reflection, especially on the gospels and the letters of Paul, that we are given to grow in the understanding of who Jesus is. Are we ready, like Peter, to make our statement of faith about Jesus? Do we really believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, who we have chosen to follow?

Let us never give up and always continue in our journey of discipleship, always striving forward to enter deeper into this mystery of Jesus.

Fr Mario