

16th September 2018 (24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Isaiah 50:5-9; Psalm 114(116):1-6,8-9; James 2:14-18; Mark 8:27-35.

Get behind me!

‘Who do people say I am?’ Jesus asks his disciples. Was this a type of popularity survey or was it really a question about the disciples’ relationship with their master: ‘And you, who do **you** say I am?’ While it is important to hear what others are saying about Jesus, the most basic question is my personal relationship with Jesus. The response to this question leads to my faith commitment and when we put all our responses together we form the Church as Body of Christ!

Peter comes forward and declares: you are the Christ, the anointed one, the Messiah! This was indeed the correct answer, but did Peter in fact understand what this statement of faith really meant? This gospel passage is an important passage to reflect upon, and the question Jesus asks is an important question for each one of us to respond to, but do we always understand what it means to follow Jesus?

Jesus warned the disciples that to follow him does not lead to an easy lifestyle; the Christ had to suffer and die. Peter wanted to create his own ‘christ!’ The model Jesus was presenting was not to Peter’s liking and he tried to remonstrate with Jesus. But the role of the disciple is not to tell the master what to do, but to follow! Jesus puts Peter back in his place and asks him rather to follow him! My position as a disciple and a follower of Jesus is to walk and follow behind Jesus and not in front of him! When I try to put my own way of thinking before the Christian way of thinking, I am acting as a stumbling block and my witness will not lead others to follow Christ but to distance themselves from Christ.

As a true Christian, each day I need to make a clear choice of being for Jesus or against him. If I choose to follow Christ and his teachings, then I too need to take up my cross and place myself in a position of discipleship. The baptism I have received comes with certain duties and obligations; the cross that I need to accept. Unlike Jesus, I may not be asked to suffer and die on a cross, but like him, I too need to die many times to my wishes and train myself to live like the Christ.

The second reading from the letter of James picks up on this theme. It is not enough to declare that I am for Jesus and that I believe, if I do not also choose to act like a Christian! My baptism and my participation in the sacraments is rendered useless if all this does not lead me to be another Christ in today’s world. When I profess that I believe in some ideology I need to express this by the way I live, otherwise my adherence would be empty and useless! James says that the only through my way of life, the way I witness to the good news, can I really be sure and nourish my faith! A faith that does not come through my actions is a dead and useless faith!

Perhaps in a practical way, every morning as I wake up and bless myself in the name of the Holy Trinity, I may once again declare with Peter: you are the Christ! And determine how to let my baptism shine through my actions during the day.

Fr Mario