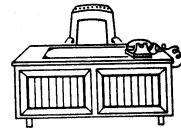


24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 12, 2021



From the Desk of
Fr. Romanus

Dear Parishioners,

In this Sunday's gospel, Jesus poses a question to his disciples: "Who do people say that I am?" Jesus clearly understood who he was as the Messiah and often identified himself in relation to God the Father, but it was doubtful that the people knew his real identity. The "I am" in this question is reminiscent of God's self-revelation to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:13-14). Could it be that Jesus deliberately included the answer in the question? He may have cued the disciples to understand his identity in relation to the Father, as the second person of the Trinity.

The responses show that some people thought that Jesus was the reincarnation of John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. During their lifetime, these prophets manifested special qualities that led some to mistake them for the Messiah. The tendency to be mistaken for the Messiah prompted John the Baptist to declare unequivocally that he was not the Messiah. He went as far as stating that he was unworthy to untie the Messiah's sandals. The irony in play here is that not only were the prophets mistaken for the Messiah, the Messiah was mistaken for the prophets. As well intentioned as the people's responses were, they still missed the mark. Hence, Jesus turned to those closest friends, his disciples and asked, "But who do you say that I am?"

Speaking on behalf of the twelve, Peter responded without hesitation, "You are the Christ." It seemed like the months of training were beginning to pay off. In Matthew's account of this passage, this was Peter's greatest moment and Jesus did nothing to conceal his excitement, showering Peter with blessings. He assured him that he would be the rock upon which the Church will be built and gave him the keys to the kingdom, to bind and to loose (Matt. 16:18-20). However, in today's gospel from Mark, Jesus has no time to lavish accolades on Peter, but quickly invokes the Messianic secret. There is an implicit sense of urgency.

He proceeded to teach them about the paschal mystery, that the Son of Man must suffer greatly, be rejected by the leaders, killed, and rise after three days. Peter's love and admiration for the master moved him to pull him aside and rebuke him for references to suffering and death. In response, Jesus said to him, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." Jesus ceases the opportunity to teach about the need for any would-be disciple to deny himself/herself, take up the cross and follow him.

Whereas Peter's revelation of Jesus' Messianic identity was his greatest moment in Matthew's gospel, it was one of his lowest moments in Mark gospel. Rather than the accolades and blessings he enjoyed in Matthew's gospel, he was scolded for trying to interfere with the divine plan. Obviously, Jesus did not mean that Peter was Satan in the literal sense but that he was acting like Satan who has a knack for putting stumbling blocks on the path of grace. Jesus was challenging Peter to focus on the good news that he would rise on the third day than on the bad news associated with suffering and death.

What if Jesus poses the same question to you today as he posed to his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" What would be your response, and how insightful would it be? We know Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah. However, the best response would be through actions manifested in our works, as St. Paul states in the second reading. We affirm Jesus' identity when we feed the poor, clothe the naked, volunteer for ministries in the parish, attend Mass, commit our talent, time and treasure to support the church and her mission. We also affirm our faith in the Messiah when we take up the cross and follow him. In Catholic teaching, faith and works are not mutually exclusive but rather two sides of the same coin. Faith is manifested in works.

Have a great week!

Fr. Romanus