

**Two Questions**  
**24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)**  
**(Mk 8:27-35)**

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks to the apostles explicitly about his upcoming passion and death. It is the first time he does so. He is entering the final phase of his public ministry, and the apostles have now completed their training under his direction.

From the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus carefully chose and prepared his apostles for their future work in the Church. They accompanied him throughout his travels, and witnessed first-hand every one of his miracles, and heard with their own ears all of his teachings. Jesus even sent them on training missions of their own, to practice announcing the kingdom of God, healing, and teaching in his name. Jesus often took them to out of the way places by themselves, spoke to them privately, and allowed them to witness things that the crowds did not, such walking on the water, and the Transfiguration. The apostles were able to know Jesus better than anyone else, with the exception of his mother.

As he enters the final stage of his public ministry, Jesus gives them a "test," to verify that they are indeed ready. This is their "final exam," and it consists of two questions, the first of which is a setup for the important second one.

In the first question, he asks, "*Who do people say that I am?*" The apostles quickly give him many answers: John the Baptist, Elijah, great prophet...

This is an important question, because it sets up for the second one, by highlighting the *mystery* of who Jesus is. There is no doubt about the fact that Jesus is "unique," "important," "great," "special," a religious figure of great significance.

A quick review of some recent Gospel readings reminds us just how unique and significant he is. Last Sunday, we heard how with his fingers he fixed a man's non-functioning hearing organs, and caused him to hear and speak for the first time! Several Sundays ago we heard how he miraculously multiplied a tiny quantity of bread and fish to feed a great crowd of around 20,000 people. In John 6, we heard him speak and say things no ordinary prophet or religious figure ever said: "I am the true bread come down from heaven; he who eats this bread will never die; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world..."

Who is this? Who is Jesus? When he spoke like that in John 6, some people asked, "*Are you not Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter from Nazareth? What do you mean you came down from heaven?*"

He is a tremendous mystery. We know he is from Nazareth, but that doesn't begin to explain or answer who he is. Mark's Gospel highlights and reveals the mysteriousness of his identity, by constantly seeking to hide it. His technique has come to be known as the "Messianic secret." The more Jesus is described and presented as a most ordinary man, the more his incredible miracles and shocking teachings highlight how he is no ordinary man. Who sticks his fingers into a deaf man's ears and all of a sudden he hears? Who is it that would say, "*whoever loses his life for my sake will save it?*" (Mk 8:35) Who is this?

Thus Jesus asks his apostles for a survey of opinions. People know he is some kind of prophet. The apostles don't mention the opinion of some, who believe he may not be a prophet at all, but a demon and a blasphemer.

Two thousand years later, this first question has only become more extensive. Opinions on Jesus today are all over the place, from the atheists and skeptics narrating BBC documentaries on Christianity, to the mythical fiction of the Mormons, to the denials of Islam. Opinions about who Jesus is, are legion. Even among Catholics, and certainly among Christians in general, Jesus can be "pretty much anything you want him to be." Many people will adjust Jesus' actual question by asking only, "Who is Jesus *for you?*" And they think this is sufficient.

It is not. In the midst of all the diversity of opinion and obfuscation, and fully aware of the difficulty of the question, the real Jesus turns to his true followers and asks them the second question. He asks them very directly and pointedly, "And who do you say that I am?"

Jesus is no longer interested in opinion, he wants to see if they know the truth, if they actually know him really and truly. Not, "Who do others say I am?" Not, "Who am I *for you?*" But, "Who am I?" He needs this group at least to know the truth, because it is through them that he will continue his work in the world until the end of the ages. Speaking on their behalf, Peter gives the answer, and he speaks truly, simply, and completely: "You are the Messiah."

"There, I said it." This is the truth. Jesus is the Anointed of God, the one prophesied and foretold in the Scriptures, the one about whom all the Scriptures write, and in whom all the scriptures are fulfilled, and without whom the Scriptures cannot be understood. He is the one all the prophets and Moses foresaw, the one for whom the Temple was built, for whom the kingdom was established, and to whom everyone looked in hope of restoration and salvation. "Messiah" is a simple answer, but a loaded one. It immediately leads to "...the whole Bible." Jesus is the whole Bible.

When St. Matthew recounts this same story in his Gospel, he gives a few more details. Simon Peter answered Jesus by saying “You are the Messiah (i.e. the “Christ”), the Son of the Living God.” (Mt 16:16).

This is the correct answer. This and this alone explains the mystery of Jesus, why he did what he did and said what he said, and was able to do what he was able to do. Throughout the centuries, the true disciples continue to answer the question of Jesus with the confession given by Peter. That confession has been more fully articulated in the Creed, but it is the same confession.

Thus when Jesus asks, “Who am I?” We need to answer, “*You are the one Lord Jesus, **the Christ**, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; Through you all things were made.*” That is who you are.

Every Sunday we learn and “practice” the correct answer to our final exam question, when we will come before God’s tribunal and presume to enter the gate. There can be no eternal communion with God in heaven if we do not know him; because the beatific vision is *knowledge* in the deepest sense. What the Creed says is what we need to know.

Opinions are useful for highlighting the mystery of who Jesus is, but the difficult work of faith requires us to know the truth. Opinions are not sufficient for discipleship, only true knowledge.

May the Father grant us also, the knowledge of Jesus which “flesh and blood” (Mt 16:17) cannot attain by its own power, so that we too might be blessed. And may our true knowledge of Jesus as professed in the Creed allow us to lead others to the truth.