

Homily – 24th Sunday of the Year B

Dear friends, today's liturgical readings help us to reflect on the test of authentic discipleship. "Who do people say that I am?" "But who do you say that I am?" Our Gospel passage (Mk 8:27-35) helps us realize the expectations of Jesus from his followers. The people of the world can believe whatever they like. Some do not see anything special about Jesus Christ. Some may compare him to John the Baptist, Elijah, Mohammed or Buddha. But the most important issue is how his own people regard him. "Who do you say that I am?" This holds the key to who we too are as Christians and what we should be as Christ's followers.

Who is Jesus Christ to you? Is he your Lord and God? Or is he simply like any other man or any other prophet of God? For you, "Is he THE WAY to God? Or is he one of the ways to God?" Whatever Jesus is to you will determine your relationship with him and the degree of your submission to him. When this question was first asked, the revelation of the person of Jesus Christ was still evolving. Today, we already know that he is the only Son of God, the Alpha and Omega, the Messiah, the Savior, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, our Lord and God etc. But Peter, the apostle, who responded on our behalf, was not as privileged as we are today. He had to receive a unique revelation and responded: "You are the Christ." The word Christ, derived from the Greek word [Χριστός] Christos, means "the Anointed One." This implies that Jesus is God.

What meaning and implication for discipleship flow from this revelation? Jesus is the Anointed one, the Beloved Son of God. He has all authority in heaven and on earth; he could change situations to his own advantage, yet he accepted suffering and death. In his words, "the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected ... and be killed, and rise after three days." Why did he do this? Was it easy for him? Certainly not! He explains that this is the way to prove his love for us: "Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Above all, Jesus did this to show us his love and obedience to the Father (cf. Philippians 2:8) and to give us an example to follow his steps (1Peter 2:21) in performing acts of charity to others for God's sake.

Jesus knows that sacrificing for others is not something we would do readily and freely; so he demanded it: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my

sake and that of the gospel will save it.” The Cross (a life of sacrifice) is presented as the authentic way to be a disciple of Jesus. This completely contradicts our worldly values where we simply desire whatever will make us feel good. People reject penance and sacrifices except where they will get worldly recognition and perhaps be known as “CNN heroes.”

The First Reading (Isaiah 50:5:9) shows how God directs his people, Israel: “The Lord GOD opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting.” This clearly anticipated the passion and death of Jesus, the sacrificial gift Jesus made of himself, for our salvation. How can we imitate Jesus in his great love and obedience? The Second Reading (James 2:14-18) puts it in practical terms: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead”. Disciples are called to make sacrifices for others to prove their love for God and neighbor.

Now, notice that Peter, like many of us today, could not initially comprehend why “the Son of Man must suffer greatly ... and be killed, and rise after three days.” He must have wondered and asked himself, “What is he talking about? Isn’t he God? Does he have to suffer and be killed?” So he tried to talk Jesus out of it. But Jesus said in reply, “Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.” What? So we see that Jesus presents the Cross as completely compatible with the will of God. Scripture says, “For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Heb 12:6). God disciplines us by making us give up selfishness and to share with others.

Finally, when the priest invites us today: “Pray brethren that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father almighty”, let us truly resolve to help one person in need as we respond aloud: “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his Church.” Let not the number of those in need discourage us. You can’t help all; but if each commits to help at least one person, the world would be a better place. Scripture says, “There were many widows in Israel in the days of Eli’jah ... when there came a great famine over all the land; and Eli’jah was sent to none of them but only to Zar’ephath And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Eli’sha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Na’aman the Syrian” (Luke 4:25-27). May we

offer our sacrifices in union with that of Christ for the salvation of souls through Christ our Lord, Amen.