

Reflection for the 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Jesus and His disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi, along the way He asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Christ." Mark 8:27-29

Today in our Gospel Reading taken from the Gospel of Mark we hear of St. Peter making a statement, that is just four words long, "*You are the Christ.*" These four words are often referred to as "*Peter's Confession,*" and this statement that St. Peter made over two thousand years ago, helped shape his life and continues to shape the Church to this day. St. Peter's statement was not made in a vacuum. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus asks two questions, "who do people say that I am?" and "who do you say that I am?" By asking the first question Jesus was creating a baseline, a starting point from where the disciples could reflect on when Jesus asked the second question. It is important the note that the first question that Jesus' asks is more than just a baseline he is asking in his second year of His three years of ministry how the people who have experienced His ministry, viewed Him. It is at this moment that the disciples of Jesus point out that the average person of their day sees Jesus as more than just a teacher but as a Holy Man, as a Prophet. Knowing the first question that was asked it would have been acceptable for Jesus to ask His disciples if they agree with the crowds and see Him as a prophet. But this is not what Jesus does; He asks them who they see Him to be. Their answer is free from the limits of what the crowds think, they are free to share who they know Jesus to be.

What Jesus does with His two questions is more than discover how people are viewing Him. Jesus is not interested in discovering if He is popular or liked, rather He is inviting His disciples to discover where they are in their journey of faith, and in their relationship with Jesus Christ. It is important to note that in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus asks His disciples "who do you say that I am?" by asking this question He is inviting them as individuals, and as a community to discover what their relationship is with Him at this moment in their journey of faith.

Just three weeks ago on August 22, 2021, when we celebrated the 21st Sunday of Ordinary time our Gospel reading was from the Gospel of John 6:60-69. In this reading we heard St. Peter's Confession but in this account, St. Peter is not just responding for himself but for the 12 Apostles when he says "*Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*" In our Gospel Reading this Sunday from the Gospel of Mark, it does appear that Jesus is asking His disciples to consider individually who Jesus is, for He asks them as a group "*Who do you say that I am.*" It is possible that in the Gospel of Mark the "you" in Jesus' question could be plural and not singular. If that is the case, then St. Peter's confession not only in the Gospel of John but also in the Gospel of Matthew, Mark and Luke is not just his individual confession of faith but also St. Peter is speaking for all the disciples. By doing this St. Peter is taking on a leadership role and it is a foreshadowing of him being the leader of the early Church, the first Pope.

Whether we see the "you" in our Gospel reading today as singular or plural there is a clear message in the questions that Jesus asks His disciples. These questions provided the disciples two thousand years ago and today the opportunity to look within ourselves and ask the question that Jesus asked two thousand years ago, who do I/we say that Jesus is? Our answer be it as an individual or as a community, confirms what our relationship is with Jesus today and what our relationship can be with Him tomorrow. St. Peter may not have fully understood the impact of the answer that he gave Jesus over two thousand years ago when he spoke for himself and the disciples, boldly stating "You are the Christ." These four single syllable words continue to impact humanity to this very day. May our answer to the same question asked over two thousand years ago also have as long as an impact on our lives and our community.