

24th Sunday OT – Mark 8:27-35

“Who do you say I am?”

Jesus questions his disciples about his identity. Previously, they had asked the question themselves but could not answer. That was in the passage after Jesus calmed the storm and they ask each other, “Who is this that even the wind and sea obey?” In today’s gospel passage, Peter, on the disciples’ behalf, replied that he was the Christ, the *anointed* one.

Jesus offered no word of congratulation but ordered *silence!* The reader knows that Peter was correct in using the title but does not yet know whether he used it correctly. He could have understood it in the sense of an anointed royal figure, a David to liberate Israel from the foreigner. He might have thought of an anointed prophet; according to Luke, Jesus had called himself such a messiah in Nazareth.

We do know that Mark’s Jesus did not want to be known as a *miracle worker* which was common in their time. Hence, it is the reason Jesus tells the persons he heals not to tell anyone about this. Miracle workers were not only common then but are also common today with traveling *gospel tent revivals*. Another problem with miracle healers in Jesus’ time is that a few can be connected to the devil.

The Christian understanding of Christ has to include the idea of suffering, death and resurrection. Preaching the “Gospel of Prosperity” goes against what Jesus preached and practiced. He tells his disciples that the Son of Man must suffer and die. This is the first ***open teaching*** of the gospel, as opposed to teaching in *parables!* Of course, the Son of Man was a glorious, triumphant figure in the Book of Daniel...who ever heard of a **suffering** Son of Man? Peter was scandalized and *rebuked* Jesus in words Jesus used in casting out a demon. Jesus in return *rebuked* Peter, giving him the name of Satan, the tempter.

Peter was thinking human thoughts, not the thoughts of God. So serious was the misunderstanding of Peter that Jesus solemnly called all the disciples to him, with the crowds, and announced a ***new requirement*** for all those who would follow after him. They had to deny themselves and take up the cross after him. They might lose their lives for his sake and that of the gospel. They might even lose their wealth. So much for the gospel of prosperity! I don’t know of anyone who is willing to die for the gospel of prosperity.

With that in mind, Jesus asks us, "Who do you say I am?" That is the core of any gospel message, our personal response to Jesus' question.

However, if we think of Jesus with too much emphasis on his divinity, then Jesus becomes for us a Greek "Deus ex machina." This was literally a crane that lifted the **hero** onto the Greek stage. Is this the savior we want, a Greek hero? Help me Jesus this time and I promise I'll come back to church. Then we will never grow up spiritually. Religion becomes following the rules and rubrics and salvation is assured.

If we think of Jesus with too much emphasis on his humanity, then Jesus becomes our buddy who is all forgiving and loving and ready to excuse any mistake we might make to the extent we lose control and susceptible to addictions from our own excess. Not much room for growing up in our spiritual life either. Or even worse we become enablers. However, if we understand and accept our own human condition, then we will be more forgiving of others. But this is only possible when we grow in our relationship with Jesus, where even he had to deal with human limitations. But Jesus is God and can do anything. Jesus didn't save himself from the cross! The High Priests mocked Jesus, "Come down from the cross if you are the Son of God."

The biggest and longest battles that the Church fought against heresies were Christological. One heresy believed that Jesus was just a man and was adopted by God at his baptism by John, "This is my beloved Son." Then Jesus became the Christ, the Son of God. Of course, that is how the ancient world perceived their own heroes and emperors and literally canonized them as gods. Another popular heresy is that Jesus was God and looked like a man, sort of the Zombie Heresy, and so forth. It took centuries and many councils and at least three creeds to develop our understanding of "Who is Jesus for us," as a Church.

The great Church in Alexandria favored Jesus as God before his incarnation and used John's gospel as their support, a Christianity *from above*. The great Church in Antioch favored Jesus born man in a manger which favored Matthew, Mark, and Luke, a Christianity *from below*. Both used the scripture to support their beliefs! Fortunately, it was the great council at Ephesus, which declared Mary, **Theotokos, Mother of God** that settled the matter once and for all. Mary, Mother of the Church, gave birth to Jesus Christ the God-man, hence she was mother of the whole package.

Jesus asks us, "Who do you say I am?" In the end it is not a relationship up here (the HEAD) but here (the HEART)!