

The Twenty-First Sunday of Ordinary Time
August 27, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

Christianity never consists in knowing about Jesus; it consists in knowing Jesus. Jesus demands a personal verdict. (Emphasis added)
(William Barclay Commentary on Matthew)

Who do YOU say that I am? A question for all ages. A question each of us must answer—within ourselves—every day that we journey on this ball of dust. Sacred Scripture is replete with answers to this question. In John’s Gospel—in Jesus’ own words: *I am the bread of life* (6:35), *I am the light of the world* (8:12), *I am the door* (10:7), *I am the good shepherd* (10:11), *I am the resurrection and the life* (11:25), *I am the way, the truth and the life* (14:6), and *I am the true vine* (15:1). These are just to highlight a few of Scripture’s definitions of who Jesus was/is. Here this morning, these words are superfluous, if each of us cannot personally answer the question. They become background noise, if we cannot define who this man Jesus is within our own hearts.

From time-to-time, each of us will be questioned as to who we are—our own identity in this life. The average person among us, will respond with what they do to provide for themselves and their families. You may be a banker, a doctor, a lawyer, or a student. Myself, I spent 22 years of my life in the United States Navy. I retired as a Chief Petty Officer and continued my career as an industrial mechanic, until I answered God’s call to become a deacon. My motto throughout all this was “If I can’t fix, it ain’t broke.” Is this who I really am? Does this truly define who we are as an individual? Who are you really? You may appear a different person to any one individual you encounter on a day-to-day basis.

This must also be true for each of us this morning, when asked by Jesus, ***Who do YOU say that I am?*** The disciples in this morning’s Gospel passage attempted to outline it for us, “*Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*” When we are called on to answer the question, we are laying out our own relationship with Christ. The answer is crucial to us as individuals and as members of the Body of Christ, the Church. Jesus is looking for our own beliefs, our own faith—not what we hear on the radio or television, not what we hear in church on Sunday morning, and not even so much as what we read in Sacred Scripture. Each of us must listen to the words and then come to a personal decision of who this man Jesus is to us, what he means in our own lives. The Holy Father, Pope Francis, put it this way, “This question, addressed to each of us, calls for more than a quick answer straight out of the catechism; it requires a vital, personal response.”

The requirement for each of the apostles and each of us, to see a personal definition of who Jesus is, was made abundantly clear in the exchange between Him and the apostles. He first asked the question, “Who do the people say that I am.” What does the man in the street say? We have already discussed their response. Jesus then asks a more direct question, ***Who do YOU say that I am?*** He is, in effect, asking if you are following the crowd. Does your faith provide for only the conventional wisdom about me? There is a more to-the-point, personal statement. He wants to know what you really think.

In a few moments, we will all stand and repeat the Creed passed down to us through all of time. The words, *I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven.* Are these only words we repeat each Sunday morning, or do these words ring true in the depths of our heart? Can we truthfully say that this is what we believe, that God sent his only Son, the second person of the Trinity to teach us love and give his life, not just for me, but for all of mankind that we might “have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10)? Can we, with confidence, call out to Him in our time of need, our time of sorrow, with certainty that he will hear and answer? Can we, in humility, personally answer His call, ***Who do YOU say that I am?***