

**Homily for August 21, 2005  
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Isaiah 22:19-23  
Psalm 138:1-3, 6, 8  
Romans 11:33-36  
Matthew 16:13-20**

## *Do we really want to proclaim Jesus as our Messiah?*

"Be careful what you wish for;  
you just may get it."

These words of wisdom seem fitting in light of today's Gospel. Peter's response to Jesus' question, "And who do you say that I am?", is not just the right response to a catechism question, but also a statement whose energy comes from the hope of every Jew of his day to see the Messiah come to them. Peter's response, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," seems to be the right answer and the right hope, a happy ending for all who acknowledge Jesus as such.

But what Peter and the rest of the disciples hope for and believe – that Jesus is the Christ – does not work out the way they had planned. They thought the Christ, the Messiah, would be the key to easy street: a life where their biggest worry would be who gets to sit directly next to Jesus, as the request of James and John (or, depending which Gospel account you read, their mother's request) seems to indicate. They envisioned a Christ who would simply destroy their enemies with the click of his fingers (as seen in the request that Jesus call down fire to destroy the unbelieving towns). They perceived a Christ who wouldn't have to pay for their redemption with his blood, sweat, and tears – not to mention his life – but rather a Christ who would just make it all happen as if by magic (as we will hear in

next Sunday's gospel).

Peter and company got what they hoped for, but also a lot of what they didn't expect. They got their Christ, but one who was not interested in prestige and social status – but in humble service. They received a Messiah who had no use for fire and brimstone, but patiently planted seeds of conversion through good news and forgiveness. They met a Messiah who did not have a place to lay his head, much less an easy chair to relax in; who did not shun pain or death since he was the Christ, but rather, because he is the Christ, humbled himself to death – death on the cross.

Now this all might not have been so bad if all of this affected only Jesus, but it didn't. To accept him as the Messiah meant to embrace what he taught and how he lived. It meant to follow the pattern of his life. It took the disciples, including Peter, a long time to understand the implications of their fulfilled hope for a Messiah, but eventually they seemed to get the true picture – and they grew to model their lives on the one whom they had hoped for.

We are to be careful what we hope for, or maybe, in whom we place our hope. We place our hope in the person of Jesus Christ, but we, like Peter and the disciples, tend to want Christ on our own terms: no pain, no suffering, just victory and ease. How often do

we come to Christ in the hope of forgiveness, but we do not forgive? How often do we call on Christ to protect us, but we do nothing to protect others who are weak and vulnerable? How often do we put our hope in Christ as the true reality of God, then live in deceitful ways – not being honest with ourselves, with our neighbors, or with God?

To place our hope in Christ is not a pick-and-choose option. To place our hope in Christ is to acknowledge him as Lord of our lives, to surrender ourselves to his will. It is an "all-or-nothing" reality. Like Peter and the first disciples, we 21st century disciples still have not completely understood what it means that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God," and sometimes what we have come to understand, we fight against accepting.

But like those early disciples, we benefit from the patience and the forgiveness of the Christ. While it may be wise "to be careful what you hope for," it is still wiser to hope nonetheless; we are to be willing to pay the price for that hope, especially if the hope is in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

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