

Homily for September 17, 2006  
24th Sunday of the Year (B)

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 50:5-9  
Psalm 116:1-6, 8-9  
James 2:14-18  
Mark 8:27-35

## *The path of a disciple always points to Calvary.*

“Who do people say that I am?” Jesus asks in Mark chapter 8. Some questions embarrass us, especially if they are too personal. The answers might hurt the questioner, as when I asked my youngest niece some questions after not having seen her in a long time. “Do you miss me?” “No.” How about: “Do you think that other people think that you miss me?” This is a hypothetical question that’s safer to answer. “I don’t know what people think of you,” she said.

There are personal questions and academic questions. We see that in the two questions Jesus asks his disciples. “Who do people say that I am?” Safer to answer: “Well, some say...” So far, so good. But then Jesus gets personal: “And you, who do you say that I am?” Now Jesus gets to the core of their hearts. Try it out in a group sometime. Keep things general. Everybody has an opinion. Get personal, and silence takes over like a sudden invader. Okay. Everyone says we need a soup kitchen. Any volunteers? Names, address and phone numbers, please. Ah, fewer takers now.

Ask a group of married Catholics, “What do you think of the church’s teaching on family planning?” People look around sheepishly, twitching in their seats.

Come on, what do you think? Not the critics, not the journalists, not the theologians, not the bishop, not the pope, not the Family Life Office, but you.

Would I say that Jesus is the Messiah because I would fear rejection if I questioned it – because in a group of Christians we know the expected answer? Peter backed off when he knew the going would get tough, and there might be hardship in the belief.

In all honesty, like Peter, most of us have hedged our faith bets more than a few times, haven’t we? We’ve struck compromises. Ah, when Jesus gets too personal, the jitters take over. Peter is the quintessential human being. “(Jesus) began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected...killed, and rise after three days.” Peter did not want Jesus to suffer, because he might have to himself. Have you ever had a recovering alcoholic tell you how their sobriety threatens old drinking pals who are still heavy drinkers? “So I’ll just have to have one more for the road with them, I guess.”

Has anyone ever tried to talk you out of a decision, as Peter tried with Jesus? The “rock” definitely obstructed the path of Jesus this time. “Who do you say that I am?” Even if you’re not sure, remember this: Jesus never wavered in his faith in Peter. He never gives up on any of us – so neither does God our Father. Our faith, like Peter’s and the disciples’, is based on a second chance – and a third and a fourth, ad infinitum. Discipleship is difficult. Words are easy; deeds are hard.

False faith hopes that Jesus will give us what we want someday. True faith trusts that we will learn to love what God wants for us, even if only by letting God strip us of our illusions and false hopes.

Sometimes it is a long pilgrimage to discover and embody the true meaning of discipleship. There's hope for all of us. So hang in there and delight in this Body of Christ we are for the moment, and receive the Body and Blood of Christ to nourish the realism God plants in our hearts for us to discover.

Let us pray: You offer one consolation only, Living God – that you are the hoped-for savior. Free us from our self-deceptions and false hopes; may we place all our trust in you through Christ our Lord, Amen.

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