

August 23, 2020

Is 22:19-23; Rom 11:33-36; Mt 16:13-20

Who do people say that I am? An interesting question that Jesus asks today. Now, just like then, it can bring up lots of different answers. The people back then were either thinking that Jesus was something that they were already familiar with (John the Baptist), or they were wishfully looking for someone to bring something else (Elijah), or they just had their own individual ideas. But really Jesus was none of those things that people thought he was. So how would we answer Jesus' follow-up question he poses: *But, who do you say that I am?*

It isn't good enough just to pick the answer we are most familiar with (like they picked John the Baptist), or the one we wish is true (like they picked Elijah), or even - as is so popular in our time - the one that "feels" right. Picking this way leads us to not see Jesus for who he really is because we choose from our own personal expectations, or we simply make our own version of Jesus that we like - and I guarantee that our own version is not as good as the real thing - we stop short of discovering an amazing truth. It is an adventure to discover who Jesus is - an adventure I continued and explored during my retreat last week.

Believing that the truth is what I already think or what I "feel" doesn't get us to the real truth by itself. If I ask the question: "Why does cement harden?" - people may stick with something familiar: "Well, I think, like plaster, it hardens when it dries out and the water evaporates" OR the wishful: "Well, I think that the stirring of the cement adds strength - the more you stir it the harder it gets." Neither is correct. Then maybe one lone voice says: "It hardens because the water reacts with certain compounds joining chemically to them in an exothermic hydration reaction. The reaction causes the formation of calcium silicate hydrate crystals which bind together in a strong and solid matrix." Ah...yes ... that's correct.

When Jesus questions the disciples on their own view of him, Peter is the only one to speak up with an answer outside the norm: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* - that is correct, and there is something about it that has a punch and depth. But there is a lot more to the answer that would still need to be explained (like what is "the Christ" or "Son of God"). This answer is like responding to "why does cement harden" with "Because of a chemical reaction with the water" - it is correct, but there is so much more than can be said. It would take time,

study, and guidance to get it. God is a being like no other and there is a depth to God that is not so easy to sum up in simple formulas. As we heard in the second reading: *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!* - God is so vast, yet His coming to us as Jesus provides us with the possibility of a relationship with God that is personal and takes a lifetime of discovery to deepen. The question, *who do you say that I am*, is one that can and should develop for us over time.

But how do we know that the answers we are forming about Jesus are actually who he is? How do we know we are not just going down the path of the familiar answer, the wishful but not true answer, the one that “feels” right but may be wrong? How do we find the truth of who Jesus is when you can talk to multiple people and get many different answers? We are fortunate that Jesus thought of that. He knew that there would always be multiple voices contradicting each other, he knew that some of his own disciples would get it wrong too. He left us with the Church to guide us. He says elsewhere: *But when ... the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth.* We believe that Jesus always knew that human minds will lean to the familiar, the wishful, the emotional, and something more would be needed to help center his disciples in truth. Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit into his Church to help guide us with a single unified voice.

When Peter gives his answer in the Gospel, Jesus affirms that this was the Spirit showing him (*flesh and blood has not revealed this to you*). Jesus tells him he will build the Church upon Peter, and Jesus gives him the keys to the kingdom. The first reading shows what Jesus means and what he is referring to. In this reading Eliakim is given authority over the kingdom - symbolized by being given the keys. In those days the Master or ruler going away would appoint a steward who knew the mind of the master and whom he trusted to act in his place until he returned. Jesus has sent his Spirit into the Church, and empowered the Church know his mind and to tell the difference between ideas based on familiarity, wishfulness, and emotion, and those based on truth. There is room for us to explore and find a personal answer, but we all need boundaries to keep us centered. Exploring the depths of God through study, prayer, discipleship, and with the guidance of the the Holy Spirit and the Church, is the way to find the truth about Jesus, the way to gain guidance in how we live our lives in a relationship with him, and to be able to answer Jesus truthfully and sincerely when he asks us: *But, who do you say that I am.*