

**Rev. Kevin V. Madigan**  
**Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel, NYC**  
**August 23, 2020     Streaming Mass**  
**21st Sunday of Year A     Mt:16:13-20**

In today's Gospel, we see Jesus asking his closest disciples what is going on, what are people saying about Me? "Who do people say that I am?" But the more important question will follow, "Who do you say that I am?" And that is a question that each of us has to answer as well. But, I think these questions are less a matter of Jesus trying to get information that He doesn't already have, and more a matter of helping His disciples articulate what may still have been a vague, unfocused, confused understanding of what He and His mission are all about.

Jesus is not John the Baptist, who had been executed by King Herod, come back to life. Nor is He the most recent in a long line of prophets. For the very way that Jesus communicated His message was different from the prophets. The prophets would begin or end their teaching by saying, "The Lord has spoken" or "Hear the word of the Lord." They were acknowledging that they had received the message they were communicating. Jesus always begins with "Amen, amen, I say to you..." He is the source of what He is saying; he speaks in his own name.

When asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter blurts out the right answer, "You are the Christ, You are the Messiah—the "anointed one"—"Messiach" (in Hebrew); Christos (in Greek). But even with this right answer, the question of who Jesus is is still not resolved, because the people of the time had various expectations as to what the Messiah would accomplish. For some, the Messiah would be a religious figure, a great high priest, who would restore the worship of the Temple in Jerusalem to what it was supposed to be. For others, the Messiah was a figure who would usher in an era of health and prosperity. For others, the Messiah was a political, military figure who would expel the Romans from their land and restore Israel to the grandeur it possessed in the time of King David.

That is why Jesus tells His disciples to tell no one that He is the Messiah, the Christ, because that designation is open to so much misinterpretation. It is only at the very end of His ministry, when He is on trial before the Sanhedrin, the council of the senior officials of Israel, that Jesus clearly admits that He is the Messiah. And then His accusers bring Him before Pontius Pilate claiming that He is a messianic revolutionary; again, their misuse of the title "Messiah" which Jesus claims for Himself. But, of course, Jesus is more than any of the customary, at the time, expectations of what the Messiah was supposed to be. He is the embodiment, the revelation, the incarnation of

God.

Still, one thing we have to remember is that Jesus never preached Himself. Jesus was not the object of His message. In the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the essential theme of Jesus' preaching was the "kingdom of God." The kingdom of God is that sphere of life where God reigns, where all that is about God takes priority in one's life; it is seeing the world with a spiritual vision, so that people, things, oneself are viewed as they really are, and not from one's own myopic, narcissistic, selfish perspective. In the Gospel of St. John, the unifying theme is the promise of "eternal life." But, both themes express the very same thing. For "eternal life" is not just something we enter into only when we die. Rather is to be understood as "life to the full, life is the fullest sense." We begin to experience that "eternal" life even now, on this side of the grave, with the hope that we will experience it more fully when we are united to the risen Christ.

Just as Jesus does not preach Himself, so He goes beyond Himself. The whole mission and message of Jesus is to introduce us into the life of the Trinity. That may sound very heady, very abstract, but actually it is very concrete and real. For the Trinity is that communion of love that is the very essence of God's own Self—the eternal giving and receiving of love between the Three Divine Persons. So, the mission of the Messiah, of God's anointed, is to empower us to become loving people. That means to be people who can give love and receive love in the manner of the Trinity. Most people are usually better at one than the other—perhaps better at receiving love, better at taking the affection, the kindness offered to them, and not giving back sufficiently in return. Others may be better at giving love, always attentive to the needs of others, but not really feeling they deserve the affection, the attention, even the compliments that others may bestow on them, again better at giving than receiving.

Let us pray that we who in Baptism have been, anointed, Christ-ened, messiah-ed, as was Jesus, can go where He leads us—into the Trinitarian life of giving and receiving love, which is the very essence, the very nature of God.