

Homily for 24th Sunday of 2021 b cycle

In the days of my youth dating back to the late fifties and sixties, one of the most popular television programs on Saturday morning was, "The Lone Ranger". What made the main character different from all others was that he wore a mask. By doing so, he concealed his identity, and kept it secret. In virtually every episode of the show, someone was likely to ask, "Who was that Masked Man?", as the Lone Ranger rode off into the sunset. Why the curiosity? It is simply because the hero rescued the townspeople from their oppressors. They wanted to express their heartfelt thanks to him for their safety.

In a remarkable scene from one of the early motion pictures featuring a popular DC comic book superhero, a criminal, having been apprehended, stares at the face of his captor, a superhero whose identity is concealed by a mask, and cries out, "Who are you?" His reply is unforgettable: "I am Batman". It was a revelation.

The one question that is at the heart of Mark's gospel is "Who do you say that I am?" It is addressed by Jesus not only to the disciples of his day but to every reader of every age. Who is Jesus?

In the rock opera, "Jesus Christ Superstar" one of the featured songs speaks of Jesus' growing popularity, "What's the Buzz". He is attracting enormous crowds because of his teaching and his healings. So it is understandable that people wanted to learn his identity.

And he does not wear a mask!

Only Peter, the first of the Apostles, answers, correctly. Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one of God. The Evangelist Saint Matthew adds, "The Son of the living God". In the Jewish tradition three types of persons were anointed: priests, prophets and kings. In his role as Messiah Jesus assumed each of these roles.

Does Peter get it right because he is the brightest of the twelve apostles? - No!

Is it because he is holy and a close associate of Jesus? - No!

It is the heavenly Father who has blessed Peter with this profound insight, and not his clever mind.

It is a supernatural gift, a special charism, an undeserved favor.

And it is upon Peter and his inspired confession that the church is built.

It is a mystery.

Apropos of today's gospel reading, two Jesuit scripture scholars, John Donahue and Daniel Harrington, write the following:

"The key to understanding Jesus properly will turn out to be the mystery of the cross. Jesus the healer and teacher is the suffering Messiah/Son of Man. To follow him means to be willing to share in his Passion and Death as well as his resurrection".

In the mystery of the cross, Jesus reveals his true identity to all of us. He is not simply a prophet, nor is he simply one of many great teachers. He is God among us, the Word made flesh and our crucified and risen Lord.

Today Jesus addresses each one of us with the provocative question, "Who do you say that I am?"

He expects an answer by the witness of our life.