

In the small courtyard outside of Chicago's Catholic Charities building a homeless man lays asleep on the park bench. He is covered with a blanket, but his feet are exposed ... bare feet ... pierced by nails. "At first, you may think it is an actual person on a bench, and as you get closer you realize, by the nail holes in the feet, that it is Jesus... It's a reminder that those whom we often view as on the margins of society are among us and deserve our care and help, just as Jesus cared for the least among us."ⁱ Jesus the Homeless is a sculpture by Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz. "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15). "If you read the Gospel, Jesus wasn't hanging around with the wealthy, the politicians. He was hanging out with the marginalized" (Schmalz).

In the painting Christ of the Arctic, Jesus is ascending to heaven. His native hands bear the wounds of the crucifixion. His left hand is pointed upwards to heaven, the right with open palm to the river below. His gaze is fixed lovingly on the fish camp below. The hard work of subsistence is evident by the rack heaped with drying salmon caught by a fish wheel along the banks of the river. "Who do you say that I am?" If you read the Gospel, Jesus wasn't sitting behind a computer surfing the internet, he walked along the shore and called fishermen to leave their nets and boats behind and to follow him.

Around the country and in other parts of the world, religious statues have been vandalized because some have objected to a particular historical figure or the way the artist represented the person. In June, Bishop Donald Hying of Madison Wisconsin wrote a pastoral letter reflecting on enculturation:

In the Catholic Church, every culture, country, ethnicity, and race has claimed Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary as their own. Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to Saint Juan Diego as a mestiza, African art depicts Jesus as Black, Asian depictions of the Blessed Mother, too, take on similarities of both bodily appearance and, often, cultural garb. In this context, are white representations of Christ and His Mother inherently signs of white supremacy? I think not. Because the Son of God became incarnate in our human flesh, does not all of humanity – every race, tribe, and tongue – have the spiritual ability to depict Him through the particular lens of their own culture?ⁱⁱ

History often reveals more about the sinfulness of man than it does about the identity of Jesus. "We must study and know this history in order to transcend it, to learn from it and to commit ourselves to justice, equality, and solidarity because of it" (Hying). "Who do you say that I am?" If you read the Gospel, Jesus is not the sinner, he is the one reaching out to sinners that we may learn to forgive, to work for justice, and to transcend the limitations of our own fallen nature.

"Who do you say that I am?" In stained glass, in sculpture, in paintings, in artwork in every medium, artists are inspired by the truth, the light, and the way trying to answer that very question.

- In the manger, we see an infant. Jesus is one of us. Magi come to offer him homage. Herod wants to destroy him. Like countless refugees around the world, he must flee his homeland seeking protection in neighboring Egypt until it is safe to return home.
- At the last supper, we see Jesus among his disciples. Judas will betray him. John will stand with him at the foot of the cross. Peter will deny him three times. In time, the eleven will pick up their cross and follow him, willing to lay down their lives for the sake of Jesus and the building of the kingdom. How will you respond?
- In the Pieta, the famous sculpture of Michael Angelo, a grief-stricken Mary cradles the dead body of Jesus. Jesus Christ has poured out his life for us on the cross that we might be set free from sin. He has given us an example of how we are to pour out our lives for

the good of others. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:25-27)

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Mt 16:13) The apostles answer by explaining what others think, but not what they think. So, he asks again: ““But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter said in reply, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’.” (Mt 16:15-16) Read the Gospel. Ponder the question. Jesus wants your response. “Who do you say that I am?”

ⁱ Cox, Ted. dnainfo.com/chicago/20140428/river-north/jesus-homeless-statue-installed-at-catholic-charities/

ⁱⁱ Bishop Hying’s Statement on the Call for the Destruction of Christian Statues June 23, 2020