

September 15, 2024
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 8:27-35

Now Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets."

And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Messiah." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

Background:

This is a turning point in Mark's gospel. Previously Jesus traveled from town to town preaching the Kingdom of God and healing. From this point forward, he will continue to preach and heal, but his journey will be deliberately toward Jerusalem. As Jesus moves toward Jerusalem he will speak three times to his disciples of his impending rejection, suffering, and death. Each time he speaks of what awaits him in Jerusalem, he will also instruct them on what it means to be his follower.

At the time of Jesus there was no consistent understanding of what the Messiah would be like. The term means "the anointed one." Within the Hebrew Scriptures the term was applied to a king, a high priest, even to the Persian King Cyrus, who allowed the Jews to go home after their captivity in Babylon. Therefore, some expected a political leader, others a religious leader, yet others a great prophet. It is not surprising that the people of the day did not seem to have a clear understanding of who Jesus was. All three of the persons cited in the gospel would indicate that many believed Jesus was a significant religious person who had come back from the dead. One might also wonder if the responses that come from the disciples reflect their own understanding as well as the view of the crowds. It is fair to say that even the disciples of Jesus had not come to a consistent understanding of who he was, even if Peter, who spoke for all of them, could say that "he (Jesus) was the Messiah." The kind of suffering servant that Jesus indicates is far from Peter's understanding.

The culture of Jesus' day is very unfamiliar to most of us. Most of us live in a culture where one is expected to strive to be independent and self-sufficient. When someone is perceived as conforming to the desires or values of others, their behavior is often seen as giving in to peer or family pressure. Other cultures hold the opinions of family and community in greater esteem than one's own. Jesus lived in such a culture. In the gospels, Jesus is spoken of as the son of Mary or even the carpenter's son. Peter is the son of Jonah, and James and John are the sons of Zebedee. While Jesus seems to have rejected the trade of his father, he was still a person of his culture. It was important to him to find his own meaning and purpose in and among his disciples, his adopted family. This may explain in some part the harsh response Peter received when he tried to privately express his belief and hope, and his objection to Jesus' talking about soon being rejected and put to death. It may also explain why Jesus tried on three different occasions to instruct the disciples about his approaching death. Jesus was still a person of his day. Perhaps he was seeking to understand his role with the help of his familial social group.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you recall some recent experiences that have reminded you how much you are a member of your family, religious community, or ethnic or racial community?

2. Are you aware of customs, expressions, and shared ways of doing things that are taken for granted within your community that might appear odd to others?
3. Did you ever imagine the discipline and suffering that have been part of your life choices?
4. Imagine you are one of the disciples and you and Jesus have been walking along the road talking and Jesus turns to you and asks, "Who do you say I am?" How do you respond?
5. Imagine you are with the disciples and you hear the conversation between Jesus and Peter. What are some of your thoughts as this short conversation unfolds?
6. What arises within you as you hear Jesus say, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."
7. Can you take some time to talk with Jesus about his role as Messiah, your desire to take up your cross, or perhaps your own experience of your cross at this point in your life?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for September 15, 2024, the Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Lord God opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back.
 I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard;
 my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. The Lord God is my help, therefore I am not disgraced;
 I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.
 He is near who upholds my right; if anyone wishes to oppose me, let us appear together.
 Who disputes my right? Let that man confront me. The Lord God is my help; who will prove me wrong?

I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.
 I love the Lord because he has heard my voice in supplication,
 because he has inclined his ear to me the day I called.
 The cords of death encompassed me; the snares of the netherworld seized upon me;
 I fell into distress and sorrow, and I called upon the name of the Lord,
 "O Lord, save my life!" Gracious is the Lord and just; yes, our God is merciful.
 The Lord keeps the little ones; I was brought low, and he saved me.
 For he has freed my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.
 I shall walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?
 Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day,

and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone might say, "You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.

Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Christ." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

Excerpts from Isaiah 50:5-9; Psalm 116:1-9; James 2:14-18; and Mark 8:27-35

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for September 15th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The opening part of the gospel from Mark is where Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am," and, "Who do you say that I am?" In the closing part of the gospel, Jesus teaches the crowd, "Whoever wishes to come after me must take up his cross, and follow me." In between is where Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ, and where Jesus first openly teaches his disciples that he must suffer, be rejected and killed, and then rise.

The other readings notably also have references to sufferings and death, and to help that comes from the Lord. In the first reading, Isaiah prophesies, "I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. The Lord God is my help; therefore I am not disgraced." Psalm 116 declares, "The cords of death encompassed me; the snares of the netherworld seized upon me; I fell into distress. I was brought low, and he saved me; he freed my soul from death." In the second reading, from the letter of James, he writes, "What good is it if someone says he has faith but does not have works? I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works. Faith, if it does not have works, is dead."

Two weeks ago in the gospel it was the Pharisees and scribes—the ones who questioned Jesus about his disciples' failure to wash hands—who disappointed Jesus. He said of them: "Their hearts are far from me, teaching as doctrines human precepts." He told them, "You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." This week, when Peter objects that the Christ should not have to endure suffering, he gets a similar rebuke from Jesus: "You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Peter has just acknowledged that Jesus is the Christ. Now the Christ Jesus is acknowledging to Peter, and the others, just what it means to be the Christ. But there is a lack of understanding, and it isn't brought to an end here, either. Consider that on the third day after Jesus has taken up his own cross, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus is still chiding followers of his who did not understand the dying and rising: "Oh, how slow of heart you are to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures (Luke 24:25-27). In spite of all the explaining and interpreting, until we get a grasp of it, for those many of us for whom this is all beyond comprehension, Peter's answer has to suffice. To Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am," our reply is like Peter's: "You are the Christ."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!