

The Twenty Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time-B

Mk 8:27-35

Dear Friends,

This passage today is the centerpiece of Mark's Gospel. All that preceded it leads up to the critical question of Jesus, **Who do you say I am? (Mk 8:28)** For the disciples, and for us, there is no more important question we must address in our life.

Up to this point in Mark's text everything was about the identity of Jesus. His miracles, his teachings, his call of the disciples, his conflicts, religious and secular, and above all, his person. They all combined to raise the issue of Jesus' identity that Peter stated so boldly, **"You are the Christ."** (Mk 8:29)

Jesus implied they were correct. Then he told them not tell anyone. He further deepened their confusion when he talked of his suffering, rejection and death. This led Peter to rebuke him only to receive a response that, no doubt, shattered Peter's world. **"Get behind me Satan, you are thinking not as God does but as human beings do."** (MK 8:33)

When Jesus then told the disciples they need to suffer and take up their cross, their bewilderment was complete. The entire second half of Mark's Gospel is an elaboration of Jesus' faithfulness to this message and the disciples' failure to figure it out.

The central issue was the difference in understanding of the role of the Messiah. Jesus understood the mystery that there is true life only in giving. For the disciples the goal of life was to be found in getting.

As Peter stated, Jesus was indeed the Christ. However Jesus understood that he was to bring about the Father's plan by suffering and self-giving and service. All his teachings had be understood in this context, the context of the crucified Christ.

Peter's rebuke was based on the real issue for the disciples and for us. We, like Peter, want to make Christ in our image. We are looking for a more comfortable version. Peter and the disciples had a plan for Christ: the provider of prosperity and privilege, security and contentment. Jesus agreed to this basic human fulfillment but at a much different level. Jesus insisted this is

only truly possible by self-giving not self-indulgence. We must learn to center on God rather than to center all on ourselves. This is what he means by **“whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.”** (Mk 8:34) The road to Jerusalem is the way into this fundamental Christian truth: life conquers death only by centering on the Father’s will not our will.

The disciples eventually got the message when Jesus invited them to Galilee after the Resurrection. He was going to give them a second chance. He gives us many times more than a second chance. He does this by giving us a second question to ponder, “How do we die with Jesus?” We need to accept Jesus on his terms when we answer that fundamental question of life, **“Who do you say I am?”** (Mk 8:27) This leads to the second question, “How do I die with Jesus?”

The Acts of the Apostles portrays a whole new cast of characters. They truly are distant from Mark’s rendering of the disciples. Their life of service and self-giving shows how they took advantage of the second chance.