

September 15, 2024 -- 24th Sunday 'B

[Is 50:5-9a; Jas 2:14-18; Mk 8:27-35](#)

Homily

This is the time of year when the weather changes. Sometimes it still feels like summer; at other times it's almost winter. The leaves on the trees have started to fall. There is no doubt about it; we know it will soon be decidedly autumn.

A similar turn of events can be seen in the Sunday Lectionary. The scene from the Gospel we have just read serves as a transition between the two main parts that make up the two halves of Mark's Gospel. Up until now, we have seen a gradual revelation of who Jesus was, even if no one understood. From now on, Jesus will begin a long journey that will take him to Jerusalem and to death. For us, after the joyful celebration of Easter, the liturgy has led us towards an understanding of certain aspects of the mystery of Christ. Now it begins to show us what this mystery requires of us.

Jesus asks his disciples, *'Who am I to the people?'* and then, *'What do you say? To you, who am I?'*

For most of us, the question *'Who is Jesus?'* probably seemed for a long time to be a rather theoretical one - no doubt until, for reasons specific to each of us, we were forced to question the meaning of our own existence. We then asked ourselves: *'Who am I?'*

Was Jesus' question to His disciples rhetorical? Was it a pedagogical device to teach them who He was? - I don't think so. On the contrary, I believe that at that moment in His human existence, this question was of vital importance to Him, for two reasons. The first was that discovering the mystery of His identity was as crucial and important to Jesus as it is to any of us; and the second was that it was no more indifferent to Him than it is to any of us to know how He would survive in the memory of His friends.

Jesus knew that He was losing the battle with the authorities of the people. He knew that he would die soon, leaving behind a handful of disciples who were very weak. Would this be the end of everything? Would His mission be a total failure? Would they remember Him? Would their memory be vivid enough to give them the strength to continue the mission He had begun and which was about to be interrupted so abruptly?

When people face a profound crisis, they need to have an even greater

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understanding of their personal identity. They also need to know that, whatever the failure or disaster, some people will not lose faith in them, and that they will live on in their memories. Jesus was at that point in his life.

He even becomes impatient with Peter, who is slow to understand and a bit like the blind man Jesus healed at the beginning of this chapter. This scene is really surprising. It is the healing of a blind man in successive stages. At first, the blind man can see people, but his sight remains so blurred that he seems to see trees walking. Jesus then performed the second stage of the operation and the blind man regained his sight completely. Something similar happened to Peter. After Jesus had calmed the sea, and while everyone was wondering, *'Who could he be?'*, it became clear to Peter that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. But it was still a hazy vision. He did not know and did not want to know that Jesus would be a crucified Messiah. He would understand this later, after the Resurrection.

The truth was as hard to swallow for Peter as it is for us, because of the consequences in His life and in ours. Following a popular candidate for royalty and a renowned miracle-worker was rather pleasant. Being the disciple of someone condemned to death was something else. And yet Jesus' message is clear: *'If anyone would walk behind me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.'* If it seems difficult, even impossible, to interpret these words, the reason is undoubtedly that they need no interpretation and do not suffer from being interpreted. They must be taken literally: *'If any man would walk behind me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.'*

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