

Homily for the 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A, August 23, 2020

In today's Gospel we have an example of an early opinion poll. How contemporary is that! We have polls everyday about our president, about our likes and dislikes, etc. This poll is different. It is about who Jesus is and it was conducted by Jesus, himself. This question is a central one: **just who is Jesus?** When you think about it, this question of just who Jesus is, is the main question of the entire four Gospels. **Why?** Because it concerns the very identity of Jesus. In fact, who Jesus is, is the very core of our faith. Everything we believe as Christians depends on the answer to this question.

In Today's Gospel, after hearing what others have said about him, Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked: *"Who do people say that I am?"* Undoubtedly, Jesus knew what the Twelve thought about him. But it was essential that they verbalize this. Peter stands up and answers for the Twelve: ***"You are the Messiah, the Son of God."***

This is a question each of us, sometime in our life also must ask and answer. Our very faith depends on the fact that we know who Jesus is and what we believe about Jesus. The early church, which spoke Greek as their language, would use a fish symbol for the Greek word **"fish"** spelled **IXTHUS** is an anagram which means **I** – Jesus, **X** -Christ **TH** – Son of God, **S** – Savior.

Those of us brought up with the old Baltimore Catechism had everything about the faith dictated to us. We were not only asked the questions but given the answers as well. Did anyone ever ask what we actually thought? Probably not. Now, however, everything is the opposite - we seem to question everything. To hear some people talk you would think that there are no objective truths or values. Instead, it is whatever a person thinks, whatever a person feels, whatever a person wants that matters. But, remember one's view can be wrong. Jesus praised Peter,

not because he had the answer but because he had the right answer. And, because of Peter's faith, Jesus makes him the foundation-stone of the Church – *"You are **Peter (Rock)** and upon this **rock** I will build my church."*

We know that living a life of faith is not easy or simple. We also know that Peter did not fully understand what he had said that day. Yes, while he recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, he did not realize that Jesus would be a suffering Messiah. This was something Peter had to learn and learn the hard way.

It is very interesting to see how Jesus dealt with Peter. How Jesus helped him to grow into the man who would eventually become a great missionary and give his life for Jesus as a martyr for the faith. Peter out of humility asked to be hung upside down by the Romans so as not to look exactly like Jesus on the cross.

Peter's growth in faith was a gradual one and there were some regressions, but that is how faith grows for Peter and for us, as well. As we go through our life we, too, have to grow in the understanding of our faith. It has to be a personal conviction that deepens with time and experience. The key question for each of us is: who is the Jesus Christ I believe in? **Since He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, how does this belief effect the way I live my life?** And don't worry if we at times falter, Peter often faltered but did Jesus still love Peter Of course! When I falter does Jesus still love me? Again – of course!