

Homily 24th Sunday Year B

‘But you, he said, who do you say I am?’

In life there are some important questions. What should I do with my life? What course should I do at college or university? What career should I follow or what job should I do next? Who shall I marry, or shall I stay single? Is God calling me to the priesthood or religious life? What is the meaning of life, what happens after death?

But there is one question which is more important than any of these. It’s a question we need to answer every day of our lives. This is the question Jesus put to his disciples in today’s gospel. Who do you say I am? Peter gave a clear and decisive answer, ‘You are the Christ.’

No-one had told Peter this, in fact Jesus went to great lengths to stop people saying he was the Son of God. It was not flesh or blood that revealed this to Peter but God the Father in heaven. Peter had received a revelation from God. As a reward for speaking the truth about Jesus Peter was given the top job, ‘You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church, I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.’

This is amazing when you look at the historical Jesus. Here we have a man born of a peasant woman in an obscure village in an outpost of the Roman Empire. He lived at home until he was thirty years of age presumably working as a carpenter. He had no specific qualifications, held no important job, never got married or had a family, never led an army nor travelled more than a few miles from where he was brought up. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. On the grand scale of things his life was insignificant.

Yet in today’s Gospel he asks his 12 friends who they think he is. ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.’ says Peter.

Jesus took a big risk choosing 12 men who seemed to be poorly qualified for the work he wanted them to do. Peter denied that he even knew him, Judas turned traitor and sold him to the authorities for thirty pieces of silver. All the others, apart from John, ran away and left him at the crucifixion. Even though he had done nothing wrong, Jesus was crucified between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only thing he owned in the whole world, his clothing. When he was dead he was laid in a tomb given to him by an admirer, Joseph of Arimathea.

This would have been the last anyone would have heard of Jesus apart from one thing, the resurrection. This is the defining moment. If Christ is not raised from the dead our faith is in vain. The resurrection of Jesus is the central belief of our faith. There have been many good people throughout history who have spent their entire lives doing good and helping people. But there would not be 2 billion Christians in the world today following a man who was just a good person or a great moral teacher without the Resurrection. This man claimed to be the Son of God and Peter recognised his true identity.

Through the resurrection we have hope in our own future glory. We have hope in the promise of eternal life. We have somewhere to go when we die, death is not the end, it is the beginning of a new life in Christ. The good news of the Gospel is that by his death and resurrection, Jesus has freed us from sin and death, given us a new life in the Spirit and opened the gates of heaven; and this brings us back to Peter, because he has been given the keys to this kingdom.

The keys to the kingdom have been passed on through time to each Pope. He has the awesome responsibility of preserving the deposit of faith and passing it on to each generation without error. If he fails in this task he can be corrected by any future Pope

The faith we profess has been revealed to us by God, it has not been invented by men. The church is not a democracy and its doctrine cannot be changed by majority vote. Our faith comes from the words of Sacred scripture and the tradition of the church.

We are able to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven through the life of grace which we possess through Baptism and the other sacraments given to us by the Church. It is a wonderful privilege to be a member of God's church. Jesus promised that the church will not fail, the gates of the underworld will never hold out against it. We show our love for the faith by coming to Mass, or in the current circumstances participating in the live stream, and being involved in the life of the parish. But we can only do this if we can answer the question Jesus asked of Peter, '*...but you, who do you say I am?*'

May the Lord bless us and Our Lady protect us.

In the name....

Deacon Kevin