

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A – 27th August 2023

Who Do You Say I Am?

Opinion polls are usually designed to represent the opinions of a population by conducting a series of questions, and usually reveal the variety and often contradictory views people can have about any particular issue or individual.

In today's gospel we have an early example of an opinion poll. And it was Jesus himself who conducted it. Even though it was a very limited one, it concerned a central issue: the identity of Jesus – and with all opinion polls, it showed that people had a variety of opinions about who He was.

Who do you say I am?

The question Jesus raised with the apostles was not a trick or trivial one. It was a very serious question. It is a question that resounds throughout the entire gospel. It is the main question of the gospel. It concerns the identity of Jesus. Everything hinges on this. That question asked of us.

It is important to come up with our own answers – to be able to state our own beliefs and values as Christians. It is not sufficient to repeat the official answers. We have to make the faith our own. A second-hand faith is a very poor faith.

In years past everything about the faith was dictated to us. We were not only given the answers but the questions too. No one ever asked 'what do you think?' We weren't given a chance to discuss, never mind question anything. As a result we might have been able to give the right answers, but if pressed as to why we believed a particular truth, or what it meant for us, we were often at a loss.

Today there may be a danger of going too far in the other direction. To hear some people talk, you would think that there are no objective truths or values. It's what I think, what I feel, what I want, that matters. But one's own view can be wrong. Jesus praised Peter, not because he had his own answer, but because he had the right answer.

However, Peter didn't fully understand what he had said. While he recognised Jesus as the Messiah, he didn't know that Jesus would be a suffering Messiah. This was something he had yet to learn, and learn the hard way.

We must grow in our understanding of the faith. The important thing is to believe out of personal conviction. The more of such people there are in the Church, the more it is founded on rock. That is why in the coming months our new Parish Mission Group will be offering us all opportunities to grow in our understanding of our Faith, and also to discover how we personally can get involved in the life and mission of our parish.

The crucial question for each of us is: Who is Christ for me? Is he the Son of the living God for me, and if so, how does this belief affect the way I live?