

## GOSPEL

MARK 8:27-35

Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' And they told him. 'John the Baptist,' they said, 'others Elijah; others again, one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he asked, 'who do you say I am?' Peter spoke up and said to him, 'You are the Christ.' And he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him.

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, 'Get behind me, Satan! Because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

He called the people and his disciples to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.'

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today's Gospel passage turns to the question that permeates the whole Gospel of Mark: *who is Jesus?* But this time Jesus himself poses it to his disciples, helping them to gradually address the question of his identity. Before asking them, the Twelve, directly, Jesus wants to hear from them what the people think about him, and he is well aware that the disciples are very sensitive to the Teacher's renown! Therefore, he asks: "Who do men say that I am?". It comes to light that Jesus is considered by the people as a great prophet. But, in reality, he is not interested in the opinions and gossip of the people. He also does not agree that his disciples should answer the questions with pre-packaged formulas, quoting well-known individuals from

Sacred Scripture, because a faith that is reduced to formulas is a short-sighted faith.

The Lord wants his disciples of yesterday and today to establish a personal relationship with him, and thus to embrace him at the centre of their life. For this reason he spurs them to face themselves honestly, and he asks: "But who do you say that I am?". Today, Jesus addresses this very direct and confidential question to each of us: "You, who do you say that I am? All of you, who do you say that I am? Who am I for you?". Each person is called to respond, in his or her heart, allowing each one to be illuminated by the light that the Father gives us in order to know his Son Jesus. And it can also happen to us, as it did to Peter, that we passionately affirm: "You are the Christ". However, when Jesus tells us clearly what he told the disciples, that is, that his mission is fulfilled not on the wide road to success, but on the arduous path of the suffering, humiliated, rejected and crucified Servant, then it can also happen that we, like Peter, might protest and rebel because this contrasts with our expectations, with worldly expectations. In those moments, we too deserve Jesus' healthy rebuke: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men".

Brothers and sisters, the profession of faith in Jesus Christ cannot stop at words, but calls to be authenticated by practical choices and gestures, by a life characterized by God's love; it calls for a great life, a life with an abundance of love for neighbour. Jesus tells us that to follow him, to be his disciples, we must deny ourselves, that is, the demands of our own selfish pride, and take up our own cross. Then he gives everyone a fundamental rule. And what is this rule? "For whoever would save his life will lose it". Often in life, for many reasons, we go astray, looking for happiness only in things, or in people whom we treat as things. But we find happiness only when love, true love, encounters us, surprises us, changes us. Love changes everything! And love can also change us, each one of us. The witnesses of Saints proves it.

May the Virgin Mary, who lived her faith by faithfully following her Son Jesus, help us too to walk on his path, generously spending our life for him and for our brothers and sisters.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Avoiding the trap of an answer which responds with a formula, or well worn words, who is Jesus to you?
- What are the features of a personal relationship with Jesus, and how are you growing in your commitment to make Jesus the centre of your life?
- How do you, like St Peter, perhaps make the mistake of rejecting the cross and following in Jesus' footsteps?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.