

## **HOMILY for 21<sup>st</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A**

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus tried to find out if the public had figured His true identity. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A man walks into a bar with his dog & says, "This is a talking dog. I'll bet you a drink." The bartender takes the bet & the man says to the dog, "What's up overhead?" Dog says, "Roof!" Bartender says, "Awww, make him say more than that." Man asks the dog, "Describe sandpaper." Dog replies, "Rough!" The bartender is still not satisfied. The guy asks the dog, "Who is the best baseball player who ever lived?" The dog replies, "Ruth!" The bartender says, "Get that dog out of here." As they walk out the door, the dog asks the man, "What should I have said? Mickey Mantle?"

I do not know what has come to your mind when you have heard Jesus asked His disciples that question. He inquired them, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" I wonder why Jesus would want to know what the public thought about Him. He certainly would not have to worry about the public opinion of him like a typical human leader would. For He did not need to seek public approval or worldly praises for his work of salvation. That is why He entered our world without any fanfare or sacrificed His life on the Cross without demanding a reward for it. However, I believe that He wanted to know if the public recognized who He really was. As His disciples relayed the public opinion of His identity, we could tell that it was all over the place. They claimed that He was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets who came back from the dead. Only Simon Peter was able to get Jesus' identity correctly as he said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." So, how could Peter get Jesus's identity right while the public did not?"

Believe it or not, Jesus gave us the answer for it in this Sunday's Gospel as following, "Blest are you, Simon son of John! No mere human has revealed this to you, but my Heavenly Father. I for my part declare to you, you are 'Rock,' & on this rock I will build my Church, & the jaws of death shall not prevail against it. I will entrust to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in Heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." Evidently Jesus let us know how Simon Peter was able to recognize His Master's true identity. Simon Peter could figure out who Jesus really was not by his own intelligence or by hearing public opinion of his Master. Rather, God the Heavenly Father was able to reveal Jesus' true identity to Simon Peter.

That special connection that Simon Peter had with God the Father not only gave him the inside knowledge of Jesus' real origin but also made him the sure firm foundation for the Lord to build His Church on earth. Jesus did not randomly pick any apostle to pass on His Church leadership and entrust that person with the pastoral care & guidance of His followers. He intentionally chose Simon Peter, the prince of the Apostles, despite his human weaknesses to be the foundation of His Church as He said, "...I for my part declare to you, you are 'Rock,' & on this rock I will build my Church, & the jaws of death shall not prevail against it. I will entrust to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven." That is why the Roman Catholic Church has believed in the decision of Jesus on this matter & followed the leadership of the Pope in the last two thousand years with Simon Peter as its first Pope. We Catholics could trace our Church tradition all the way back to Jesus Himself.

Now I would like to discuss a little more about the importance of knowing one's own identity. Indeed, Jesus began today's Gospel by asking His disciples on how the public identified Him. Knowing one's own identity is so crucial to keep a person focused on one's life mission and hold a person accountable for one's actions. For a leader like Jesus, His identity is so vital to His mission of salvation & the future of His Church. Throughout His life & ministry on earth, Jesus was always true to His identity as the Messiah & the Son of the living God. He obeyed God the Father to carry out the mission of a suffering Messiah & was faithful to it until the end. His identity stuck with Him throughout His ministry & helped carry Him through the darkest moments of His life. Without knowing His identity, Jesus might have felt discouraged along the way & abandoned His mission when it got tough. Instead, He held high His identity & understood the message of today's Second Reading, namely, "For from Him [God], through Him [God], & for Him [God] all things are. To Him [God] be glory forever. Amen." Jesus did everything for the glory of God the Father, not for His own glory because He knew who He was.

I believe each Christian/Catholic should know one's own identity. Otherwise, we would not understand what our life mission is & then would fail to live up to what Jesus calls us to do. I think that is the problem that the world is facing right now, namely, identity crisis. Most people do not know their own true identity. Indeed, Christians/Catholics of our time do not know who they really are. That is why they have failed to follow in Jesus' footsteps & refused to feed the hungry, heal the sick, comfort the dying, & carry their daily crosses. Church leaders have also failed to recognize their own identity & live up to it. That is why priests have abused their power & got into all sorts of troubles such as the children sexual abuse scandal. Meanwhile, bishops have not figured out how to address all the problems of our time & keep up Church membership.

Likewise, our political and world leaders do not know who they are at all & have failed to live up to their leadership positions. They are supposed to serve the public. On the contrary, they have only cared about their own benefits while neglecting the welfare of their citizens, whom they are called to serve. In fact, we could trace the identity crisis to all the social problems of our time. The first social problem is the number of divorces for married couples in our day & age. If a couple would know their own identities as spouses & parents, there would not be many divorces & broken homes as we have seen now. We could also put all the mass shootings & random acts of violence under identity crisis as well. Most of those culprits did not know who they were & failed to live up to the life missions that the Creator had called them to do. In fact, the current health problem is another form of identity crisis. Its victims either have forgotten who they are or have allowed the present challenges to threaten their own abilities & future promises. As you can see, knowing one's own identity helps a person remain faithful to one's life mission & avoid all the scandals & social problems of the time.

My dear brothers & sisters, who do people say that we are? I hope we all know who we are & what our life missions are supposed to be. If we have not figured out all of that yet, today Jesus encourages us to take time to think about it. I pray that we would soon find out our own identities so that we will live up to the life missions that God has prepared for us. More importantly, we will help reduce all the scandals & social problems of our time & help build up a loving & peaceful world.