

Jesus is the **Lord**, the Savior sent by God to redeem the world, the Son of God made man. That's what St Peter asserts in today's Gospel, and Jesus doesn't contradict him.

- Yet **many** people do not consider Him to be Lord.
- Some say He was a great philosopher, a good teacher, or a misguided lunatic.
- This question of our Lord's **true identity** is one that people have argued about **non-stop** for the last twenty centuries.
- And even for those of us who claim to be committed Catholics, it is an **important** question.

But the **important** thing about today's Gospel passage is not only the **fact** that the question is **raised**, but **how** the question is presented.

Jesus actually asks his disciples **two** questions: "Who do **people** say that I am?" and "Who do **you** say that I am?"

It is **not enough** for us to discuss his identity in an **abstract, academic** way.

- Sometimes **earthly** rulers are satisfied with a **superficial** allegiance - as long as they get our vote, they won't try to invade our **personal space**.
- **Christ's** Kingdom doesn't work that way.
- **To be a Christian by name** only, a nominal or cultural Catholic, as it is sometimes called, **is not enough**.
- It is **not enough** to know what **other people** say about Jesus; we each need to **encounter and respond to Him personally**.
- We need to proclaim His lordship not only with our **lips**, but with our **lives**.
- We need to say not only that Jesus is **the** Lord, but that He is **our** Lord, **my** Lord, and that we are willing to **follow** wherever he leads.

It is this **personal adherence to Jesus Christ**, this **taking of responsibility** for our faith, that opens the door to **spiritual maturity** and the **wisdom, joy, and interior peace** that spiritual maturity brings with it.

Notice in these two questions how many of the disciples joined in to answer His first question. "Who Do people say that I am?"

And only one, Peter answered the question, "Who do you say that I am?" **You see it is a personal question that each of us have to answer in our life, every day.**

In my own faith journey, I have to admit, Jesus was not at the center of my life as a young man. Sure I went to mass, sure I received the sacraments, but I did not have a mature relationship with Him. He never lost track of me and over the course of years He gently called me to come to know Him. Know Him in marriage, in fatherhood, in prayer, in scripture, in teaching and most recently in serving Him through the graces of the Diaconate.

It was a journey of **surrender**. Surrender those things I thought were important to those things He had waiting for me. I note, it was not a one-time surrender, but an everyday surrender.

He continually calls us into that **personal relationship** through Prayer, Sacraments and Works of Charity.

Critics of the Catholic Church sometimes say that our traditions, rituals, and sacraments **take away** this person-to-person dimension of our relationship with God.

They say that we should just "**go directly to God**," instead of using **intermediaries** priests, the Mass, confession, and traditional prayers.

But this is a **false argument**, for two reasons.

First, because the Church **does** in fact encourage us to "**go directly**" to God, all the time, as often as we can!

Here's how Pope Benedict XVI put it in a speech to youth in New York, in April 2008:

- "What matters most is that you **develop your personal relationship with God**."
- The Church doesn't **discourage** us from having a personal relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ - on the **contrary**!

The **second reason** this is a false argument has to do with the **reason behind** the sacraments, rituals, and traditions.

- When we understand them **properly** and live them **sincerely**, they actually **help us** encounter God **more** personally.
- In fact, that's why the Holy Spirit invented them - precisely to give us **more opportunities** to experience God's **closeness** in a personal, tangible way.
- When we confess our sins to a priest in the Sacrament of **Reconciliation**, for example, it is a **personal encounter**, a **truly human encounter** in which God assures us of his forgiveness in the most **down-to-earth** way possible.
- And when we receive **Holy Communion**, once again Jesus is making himself **tangible, nearer** than we could ever make him all by ourselves.

The Church is God's **gift** to us, full of **instruments** that he uses to reach out to us in ways that we can see, hear, and touch.

As we continue with this Mass, let us **thank God** for taking such a personal interest in each one of us, and let's **promise** never again to take for granted this **most important relationship** of our lives. **Who is Jesus for you?**