

12th Sunday of the year, 2016

Jesus is a question mark for many people today, and that question mark began in his lifetime as well. Was he Elijah, the prophet who had left this earth and was expected to return to announce the coming of the Messiah? Or was Jesus, as King Herod seemed to think, a re-incarnation of John the Baptist? Or perhaps he was one of the other prophets, leading me to ask: Who are our prophets in today's world?

To clear up this confusion, Jesus asks his disciples: Who do people say that I am? And to this end, the disciples repeat the various speculations of the crowd. And then they are asked the most biting of all questions: But who do YOU say that I am? Peter, speaking for all, replies: You are the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed one of God. Clearly this is a high point in Peter's relationship with Jesus. Unlike the crowds or Herod, the Apostles now know who Jesus really is.

But it is not enough to recognize Jesus as the Messiah or to be filled with wonder and compassion at his suffering, death and resurrection. We are called to be followers, disciples. And, as disciples, Jesus today calls on us:

To deny ourselves,

To take up our cross every day,

And to follow Him.

Of course, to deny one's self in one sense is not possible nor is it desirable. We are encouraged to promote our self-esteem and to have full acceptance of ourselves. In a way, we cannot do otherwise. But there are good and bad ways of going about self-affirmation. If we affirm ourselves by putting down other people, then it is self-defeating. After all, selfishness, self-centeredness are quite distinct from a wholesome self-love, self-appreciation, and self-acceptance.

And it is to our best advantage to open ourselves totally to those transcendent values that the Gospel presents to us. But to take up our cross every day is not to go out of our way looking for pain and trouble. That would be a very unhealthy way of behaving. It does mean accepting what comes into our life and positively and constructively seeing God's love and grace in every experience, even in the most painful episodes of our lives.

We have heard it said that no man, no woman is an island. To be spiritually mature, we need to push ourselves outside of our comfort zones and one way to do this is by giving up a weekend and going on a retreat, and in this case, an ACTS retreat. In a moment I will ask Sam Akins to explain what an ACTS retreat is all about, as it pushes us into deepening our relationship with Jesus. The Men's retreat will begin downtown this July 28th, a Thursday, and end at the 11:00 Sunday Mass here at St. John the Baptist. Both Tim Moore and Mike O'Conner have made this retreat, but unfortunately their jobs have necessitated a move out of state and so they will not be joining us. I also made this retreat and can attest that it is a profoundly moving experience. Now here is Sam to fill in the details of this Catholic movement throughout the U.S.