"Who Do You Say That I Am?"
Twenty-First Sunday In Ordinary Time 2017

Reflection By: Deacon Paul V. Hursh

"We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) In all things, other than sin, Jesus is like us. Accepting this will keep us from committing a host of heresies. The belief that Jesus was fully God and fully man means that he was not spared any of the challenges we have and so we know that he could experience temptation (Matthew 4:1), doubt (Matthew 26:39), sorrow (John 11:35), the pain of thirst (John 19:28), and despair (Matthew 27:46). If we accept this reality of Jesus, it is understandable that there might be some confusion about who Jesus is. As we hear today many of Jesus contemporaries thought he was John the Baptist or one of the prophets of old. To this day many of the Jewish faith and Islam believe that Jesus was a prophet.

Our faith is based on the belief that Jesus was not the only son of man, but also, Son of God. This makes all the difference in the world. It means that we do not have a God who is distant, aloof from our struggles in life, or a God that we should fear. The good news is that we have a loving God who chose to be like us in all things, but sin. "For the Son of God became man so
that we might become God.” (St. Athanasius) And this is the point of Jesus’ question. Sure, it was helpful for Jesus to know where he stood with his contemporaries and his disciples, but more importantly, is what the answer to this question means for us.

Key to who we are is how we understand Jesus and who we believe he is to us. Many have accepted Jesus as a wise and compassionate man and even believed him to be a prophet, but there is much more to his question than what he did. The central aspect and most important fact for the believer is, who is Jesus. If we accept on faith that Jesus is "the Christ, the son of the living God," then everything must change for us. Believing that Jesus is God is a game changer. As we see, for the rest of the Gospel the disciples struggle with Peter's answer to the question of Jesus' identity. This should not come as a shock to us, because, if we are honest, we also struggle with Jesus divinity. Faith, and especially belief in Jesus is always a struggle, otherwise, it would not require faith. Faith only deepens with our openness to transformation to lives of commitment to the mission of Jesus.

Just as the disciples of old struggled until the end and often failed to go all the way to the cross with Jesus, so too do we struggle with deep commitment to Jesus and the cross he asks us to bear. On a good day we are all in, but just like Peter, we will face times when we would rather deny Jesus than identify with him when the risks are high. There are some, like Judas, who will even sell out for the riches of this world in exchange for the Kingdom of God. Blessed are we that we have a loving and compassionate God who is ready to forgive and give us another chance to recommit.

Who do you say Jesus is? Can you, like Peter, make the leap of faith and testify that he is the Christ the son of the living God? If so, make this commitment now. It is important to do this in your heart and publicly if possible. This is the beginning. After your verbal assent, there is a need for committed action. You need 'skin in the game.' This does two things. First this puts you on record in the community so that others can hold you accountable, and secondly, your good works are a sign of your faith and will build up the Kingdom of God.

I am sure you have made faith commitments in the past and may have done much work in the Kingdom. Ask yourself, "Have I been true to my commitments and do I still work to build up the Body of Christ, the Church?" Paul proclaims, "In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you." "Behold now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2)