

“WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

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In the Gospel today we hear Jesus ask his disciples a fundamental faith question:

“Who do people say that I am?” Following their responses he asks them: “Who do you say that I am?”

This is a question that can be asked of us at every stage of our life. Sometimes we might answer: Jesus is my savior or my liberator; other times, he is my companion, my friend. And so forth.

Before I joined the Jesuits my answer to Jesus’ question would likely have been pretty theoretical: “Son of God” or “Second Person of the Holy Trinity.” This changed when I made what is known as the Long Retreat (30 days) – the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius - in the Novitiate. The change happened in two ways:

We were introduced to Jesus by using our imagination in praying Gospel passages where he is doing something. The purpose of this kind of meditation is to fall in love with Jesus and to enter into a personal relationship with him. The second came in the meditation, “The Call of Christ the King.” It is the invitation that was offered to some fishermen on the north shore of the Lake of Galilee, it is the invite that Mary of Magdala and other women heard. There was something about this man, Jesus that caught their hearts and enabled them to respond wholeheartedly to his Call.

It is an invitation made to each of us.

In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius encourages the one making the retreat to pray for a deeper knowledge of Jesus: knowledge of the head and of the heart.

“Who do you say that I am?”

II

Reflecting on one’s relationship with the Lord, writer Barbara D’Artois, shares another perspective on this Gospel. She writes:

“A recent retreat I attended was based on the question, “Who do you say that I am?”

We spent our time of meditation focusing on a reverse question: “Who am I?” “How do I see myself? How does Jesus see me?”

Awhile back I co-directed a retreat with spiritual director Dotti Hulburt, of San Diego. She shared the following reflection on the question, “Who Am I?” – in relation to a variety of stories in the Gospels.

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WHO AM I?

I am the sheep that wandered off alone, hungry and afraid.
I am the younger son and I have squandered my inheritance.
I am the woman bleeding and I have been bleeding for a long time.
I am the man with the withered hand and I can't do much for anyone.

I am the man with demons inside of me, destroying my life.
I am the one robbers beat and left defeated on the road to Jericho.
I am a face in 5000, hungry, and Your disciples say they can't help me.

I am in a sinking boat on a stormy lake and You are asleep.
I am sick and lying on a mat and I can't walk to You.
I am deaf and want to hear.
I am blind and want to see.

I am the mother whose only child has just died.
I am out of work and I've been standing in the marketplace all day and it is too late for the day's wages.

I am Martha, busy, busy, and very frustrated.
I am the poor man at the rich man's gate.

I tried to throw a wedding party and ran out of wine.
I am the woman at the well, quick-witted and snappy and life is a mess.
I am Lazarus bound and buried.

I am Judas who betrayed You.
I am Peter who denied You.
I am all who abandoned You.

Jesus wants to gift us with his love because he knows us and our needs.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on our relationship with Jesus and on the two questions posed in this Homily: Jesus: "Who do you say that I am?" and "Who am I in Jesus' eyes?" the following words from the Responsorial Psalm offer us encouragement and hope.

"Lord, Your love is eternal.
I give thanks to you with all my heart,
for You have heard the words of my mouth.

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When I called, you answered me;
You built up strength within me.
Your kindness endures forever."

AMEN.