

Ordinary Time 24B 2015
Who Is He?

As I read through today's gospel, I asked myself what we would say if Jesus asked us the question he asks his disciples in this morning's gospel: Who do people say that I am? What are the people of the Farmington Valley saying about me these days? As I thought about this question I formulated the following responses. (1) Some say you are an interesting figure of the past, but your day has past. (2) Others say you are a great religious figure, the greatest religious figure of all time, but unfortunately we are living in a post-religious age. (3) And still others are saying you are a good man, a wise man, a spiritual man—but you are only a man.

It is always interesting to know what other people are saying and thinking. And so we constantly take surveys and polls, and then we study and analyze them so that so that we know what others are thinking. But while it is interesting and even entertaining to discuss what other people are saying and thinking, what they think and say cannot excuse us from making our own decisions. And so, after Jesus asks his disciples what other people are saying, he says to them, but *you*, who do *you* say that I am

It is at this point that Peter made the marvelous confession of faith we just heard: "You are the Christ." You are the long-awaited Messiah, the Savior of the world. Peter knows what other people are saying about Jesus. He has heard the rumors and reports. But unlike others, Peter has seen and heard Jesus; he has experienced and known him; *he believes in Jesus!* And so, despite what others are saying, he decides for himself, and he makes the marvelous confession of faith we have heard.

But then something disturbing happens. Jesus begins to speak about the suffering and death that lie before him, and Peter rebukes Jesus. Far be it from you Lord to suffer such

disgrace! Far be it from you Lord to suffer and die! But Jesus will have none of it, and in the strongest possible language he rebukes and reprimands his most important disciple. You see, Peter has correctly confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, but he does not understand what kind of Messiah Jesus is. (1) Peter is looking for the glory and the power, but Jesus knows that he must first endure the shame and disgrace of the cross. (2) Peter is seeking life without death; Jesus knows that eternal life can only come through death. (3) Peter wants the honor and glory now without the suffering; Jesus knows that before the glory there comes the suffering of the cross.

Today people have all sorts of opinions about Jesus and the church. Read the newspaper, watch television, read your tablet and you will find an endless stream of opinions about Jesus and the church. But at some point, we must make up our own mind. At some point we must answer the question for ourselves: Who is He? Who is this Jesus, and what is this community of believers we call his church? Is he just another religious figure of the past? Is the church just another human organization?

I have been answering this question for myself my whole life long: as a believer, as a university professor, as a priest of the church. And as I have grown in my understanding of the faith I am more convinced than ever that Jesus is not a mere figure of the past, nor is his church just another organization. He was, he is, and he will ever be the eternal Son of God, the Savior of the world. And his church, for all its failures and weaknesses, is a means and source of God's grace—provided we take up our cross and follow Christ. This is what I believe. This is why I believe.