

Ordinary 12C 2013
Father Frank Matera
Who Do You Say That I Am?

There are some questions we must answer for ourselves—questions no one else can answer for us. For example, if you ask me what you should do with your life, I can give you advice, I can give you counsel, but I cannot answer that question for you. Because the answer to that question will affect your whole life, it is a question you must answer for yourself.

This is the kind of question that Jesus asks in today's gospel when he says to his disciples, "But who do *you* say that I am?" The disciples, of course, had heard what others were saying about Jesus. They knew that some thought he was the reincarnation of John the Baptist or Elijah. They knew that others thought he was one of the prophets of old raised from the dead. But now the moment of truth had come. They had seen Jesus heal the sick, cast our demons, and raise the dead. They watched him eat with sinners and forgive sins. And so, when Jesus asks them, "but you, who do *you* say that I am" they can no longer repeat what others are saying. They must answer the question for themselves.

It is at this critical moment that Peter speaks on behalf of all of the disciples: "You are the Christ of God." Notice what Peter confesses. He does not simply say "you are the Christ," he proclaims, "You are the Christ *of God*." Peter and the disciples understand something that nobody else does. They know that Jesus is *God's* anointed one, the Christ, the one whom God has designated to bring salvation to the world.

If you ask people what they think about Jesus, you will get all kinds of answers today. Some will say that he is a teacher, the wisest teacher who ever lived. Others will claim that he is a holy man, the holiest man who ever lived. Still others will insist that he is a prophet or miracle worker, the most powerful figure who ever lived. All of these answers are right; and all of them are wrong.

If Jesus were only a wise and holy man, a prophet and miracle worker, there would be no reason for us to gather in his name today. If Jesus was the greatest human being who ever lived, it would be blasphemous for us to worship him week after week. But if Jesus is who we proclaim he is—the eternal Son of God, God's Word made Flesh, the Redeemer and Savior of the World—then there is good reason for us to be here week after week. We are here because Jesus Christ is living and present in our midst. We are here because the risen Lord is present to us in the Scripture we proclaim and the Eucharist in which we share. We are here because, in Jesus Christ, God is present to our lives.

"Who do *you* say that I am? Although others would gladly answer this question for us, this is the kind of question that we must answer for ourselves. This is the kind of question that only we can answer for ourselves. And how we answer it will affect the whole of our lives.

If we say that Jesus is just another religious figure, he may be the most important figure of history, but there is no reason for us to give our lives to him or follow him in the way of discipleship. But if we confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the one in whom God is

present to the world then Jesus Christ makes a claim upon our lives that no one else can. For if he is God's Son, to hear his voice is to hear the eternal Word of God. If he is the Word made flesh, he is the way, the truth, and the life that leads to the Father.

Who is Jesus? Only you can answer that question for yourself, and how you answer it makes all the difference.