

***The Crucified Messiah***  
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For the past year, most of our gospel readings have been taken from the Gospel according to Mark. In fact, we are now at the midpoint of that Gospel; and what we have heard thus far can be summarized in this way. Jesus comes to preach the kingdom of God. To usher in the kingdom he cures the sick, he casts out demons, he overcomes the chaos of nature by calming the sea, he feeds the hungry, and he even raises the dead.

As Jesus' ministry gains notoriety, however, people begin to ask, "Who is this man?" Indeed this is the one question that repeatedly arises in the first half of the Gospel. And so it is at this point in the Gospel, after Jesus has performed so many mighty deeds, that he asks his disciples who do people say I am. After the disciples report what others are saying, Jesus turns to them and asks: "But you, you, who do *you* say I am?"

Peter's answer is the climax of the first half of the Gospel, and the attentive reader finally breathes a sigh of relief. At last someone has understood who Jesus is. Peter has correctly identified Jesus as the Messiah. But as soon as Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus begins to teach his disciples what must happen to him: he must be rejected, suffer, and put to death before rising from the dead. It is at this point that Peter shows that even though he has confessed that Jesus is the Messiah he does not really understand who Jesus is.

Thinking in terms of power and glory, Peter rebukes Jesus for talking about suffering and death. Peter has correctly confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, but he does not understand what kind of a Messiah Jesus will be. Peter thinks in terms of power and glory, but Jesus thinks in terms of suffering and death. Peter thinks in terms of a glorious king who will be served by others, but Jesus thinks in terms of a humble king who comes to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

What does it mean to confess that Jesus is the Christ? What does it mean to say that he is the Son of God, the Savior of the World? It all depends on our point of view. If we think in the way Peter thinks, we will think in terms of power and glory. If we think in the way the world thinks. We will think in terms of achievement and success. But if we have the courage to view reality from God's point of view, then we will think in terms of service and suffering for others. If we have the courage to view our lives from God's point of view, we will begin to understand that discipleship is a process of dying to ourselves in order to life for Christ. We will understand what Jesus means when he says that we must lose our life in order to save our life.

Why have so many Catholics left the church today? Why is contemporary Catholicism so timid and indifferent? Why are so many of us just like everybody else? Why have we lost our sense of nerve and courage? Why are we afraid to reach out to

others? In other words, we are like Peter. Like Peter we can make the right confession of faith; but we fail to understand the full meaning of that confession.

Many of those who have left the church did not understand the role of the cross in the Christian life. They did not understand that the Christian life involves rejection and suffering for the sake of the gospel. They did not understand that there is no cheap grace; they did not understand the cost of disciples. They did not understand the need to lose their lives in order to save their lives.

If we are to reach out and bring them back, we must model a costly discipleship that embraces the cross, a discipleship that understands there is no glory apart from suffering, there is no life apart from dying, and there is no salvation without the cross.

As we celebrate this Eucharist in which we enter into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, we ask for the grace to understand what it means to confess that Jesus is the Christ; we ask for the grace to surrender our life for the sake of the gospel so that we may gain our life.