

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

One of my professors at the Seminary recommended to us the spiritual exercise of praying through all of the questions Jesus asks in the Gospels. (Confession time!) While I have never taken him up on the challenge, I do pay more close attention to Jesus' questions in the Gospels. Today, two of these questions show up:

Who do the people say that the Son of Man is? (Matthew 16:13)

Who do you say that I am? (Matthew 16:15)

The first question takes a tally of the world. The people of His time called Him a prophet, as do some today. Today, the world calls Jesus many things: a good teacher, a moralist, founder of a religion, a leader, maybe even misunderstood. As Catholics, we call Jesus: God, Emmanuel, Son of David, Son of God, the Word Incarnate, Prince of Peace, Savior, Lion of Judah, the Lamb of God... and on and on. Posters have been made with all of the names of Jesus!

After Jesus asks what the world calls Him, He asks the more important and poignant question: "what about you: who do you say I am?" We may be able to answer this question with a good catechism answer, and Sr. Mary Emmanuel will give us a star on our paper and an A for the day. But does that really matter? What good does it do us to spout good theology, if we don't live it? What good is it if we can say "Jesus is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the eternal Son of the Father, the Word Incarnate, uniting divinity and humanity in the one hypostasis of the omnipotent Second Person of the Godhead," if it makes no difference in our lives?

I don't doubt that most who read this will be able to answer Jesus' question in a textbook perfect answer, but I found that, confronted by this question, I needed to look deeper into my own life. I encourage you to do the same.

I have shared with you before that while I *profess* Catholicism, I very often *live practical hedonism*. What is hedonism? The boiled down definition is that it is the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. When first confronted with this word, I balked, not thinking that it really applied to me. After all, I have given up so much for God. Or at least, I thought so. As I pondered over it, though, I came to realize that so much of my life is about seeking comfort (which seems to be a nicer word than pleasure, but doesn't really seem to be very different). Much of my life is about avoiding pain, and even avoiding discomfort. It shows itself in the way I eat, the way I talk, the way I spend my free time, the way I work, how I relate to others, how I spend my money, how I react when my plans are disrupted, etc.. Jesus tells us the way to joy is to deny ourselves, to take up our crosses... I agree, I believe this, I have experienced it so many times in my life... yet, much within me still reacts strongly to times of discomfort.

Who do you say that I am?

That question again! If Jesus is truly God, then He knows and shares and models the best way to live, to think, to speak, to act. If I believe that Jesus built His Church – who is not an organization, institute or society, but the very Bride of Christ, the Body of Christ, the presence of Christ in the world, with all of His teaching authority, and authority to bind, to loose, and to keep the keys – on the rock of Peter, **do I submit** my actions, my thoughts, my will, even my desires, to the teaching of the Church? When I struggle with the teaching of the Church – whether by logic (meaning, I can't figure it out) or by practice (meaning, I struggle to live it out) – do I assume, in my pride, that I am right and the Church is old fashioned and out of date?

Submit. A hard word for today! But in this context, it is a word of *love*, not of domination. To submit to God is to submit to suffer, yes, to hardship and the cross. Jesus never promised that it would be a life of ease. In fact, the great Catholic writer of the last century, G. K. Chesterton, put it so aptly: "Christianity has been found tried and wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." In the face of the cross, though, submission to God is to submit to joy, to life, to fulfilment – not despite the cross, but *because of it!* It is difficult to live as God commands... yet THIS IS LIFE! And God is not going to command something without giving us the grace to do it; He makes the impossible possible!

I pray that as we reflect on this weekend's question from Jesus – **Who do you say that I am?** – we may answer not only with our intellects, but with our whole lives, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God**" (Matthew 16:16).