



August 21, 2011

The Twenty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Who do you say that I am?"—Matthew 16:15

Dear Friends;

How do we come to know who we are? In America we generally feel that is something we discover by ourselves. There was a time that self-discovery was used as an excuse for abandoning jobs, relationships and family. One would only have to say, "I have to go find myself" and off they went. The smart quip to that was, "Well, where did you put it?"

The culture of Jesus and the Bible was very different from our individualistically focused culture. In Jesus' Mediterranean world you can only come to know who you are through the loving eyes of another. It is family and friends who show me who I am. We are relational, social creatures. If you want to know who you are, you need to ask those you love and trust and who love and trust you.

So when Jesus is placing the question to his disciples, who do you say that I am, it is not a test. Jesus is trying to understand who he is. The difficulty is the labels that others have been placing on him do not exactly fit or fully reveal his identity—Nazarene, son of Mary, the carpenter's son, brother of James and Joses, don't we know his sisters, where did he get all this? These answers don't fully answer the question.

So Jesus places the question to those who have been closely following him who had seen what he has done—healing the sick, driving out demons, feeding the thousands with five loaves and two fish and walking on the stormy waters. It is Simon who responds that Jesus is God's "Anointed" and that the power of God dwells in Jesus.

In turn Jesus tells Simon who he is. The name "Simon" means "reed." Reeds are hollow and supple but also fragile. They were used as writing instruments and musical instruments. They also break easily. But God used this reed Simon to announce who Jesus truly is. And in this proclamation he becomes "Rock" which is what the name Peter signifies. This confession of Peter is the rock—faith in Jesus who is Lord. It is on this profession that the Church—the faith community—is built.

It is interesting that Jesus will often call his trusted companion by both his names Simon (his birth name) and Peter (the name Jesus gives). This may be an expression of the paradox of Simon Peter's character which was a mixture of both weakness and strength. Yet this Simon Peter is able to get the message correct.

We see this when after Jesus' death he goes into hiding but then on Pentecost filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter is able to proclaim to a Jerusalem full of pilgrims, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Peter should fill us with hope because like him we are all a mixture of weakness and strength darkness and light. And yet if we can be open enough God can and does proclaim the Good News through us. And we come to know who we are—Christians—God's anointed ones.

Peace,

Fr Ron