

I AM THE WAY

Once, up in a place in northern Galilee, Jesus asked his apostles a question. “Who do people say that I am?” Different apostles gave answers. Some think you are John the Baptist come back to life.” “Some think you are the returned prophet Elijah or Jeremiah.” Some say you are another prophet. So Jesus asks them: “Who do you say that I am?” Notice, Jesus does not ask who they “think” he is. Jesus asks them who they “say” he is, for example when Jesus is not present and they are talking about him. What do they say then?

Then Peter steps up and says “You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” And Jesus praises Peter because Jesus knows that his heavenly Father has revealed this to Peter and Peter is beginning to grasp just who Jesus really is. But there is still something missing from all of this. Who does Jesus say that He is?

In the gospels Jesus calls himself the Son of Man. The prophet Daniel used this expression about the Holy One of God who would come one day. Jesus identifies himself as Son of Man. But it is not until he is dragged before the High Priest in the night session of the Sanhedrin that Jesus finally admits that he is the Holy One, the Son of the Living God. That revelation will seal his doom. But all throughout the Gospel of John Jesus says things like: “I am the Good Shepherd.” “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” “I am the Bread of Life.” “I am the sheepgate.” “I am the Light of the World.”

And then, in today’s gospel at the Last Supper Jesus says: “Thomas, you know the way.” “Thomas says: Master we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus says in response: “I am the way and the truth and the life.” Where then does that leave us today, two thousand years later? Either Jesus is who he says he is which means that we really must believe in him and follow him; or he is out of his mind or a deceiver which means then we should be against him. There really is not a third choice. What do I mean? That Jesus is some really good person, though he isn’t divine, he is a good, kind, and wise ethical teacher. But that is not who Jesus himself says he is. If he isn’t who he says he is, then he isn’t admirable at all.

Jesus compels a choice in each of us, and in all of us. What Jesus compels is different from every other major religious figure in history. No other religious founder does what Jesus does. The Buddha could claim that he had found a way that he wanted to share with his followers, but Jesus said, “I *am* the way.” Mohammed could say that, through him, the final divine truth had been communicated to the world, but Jesus said, “I *am* the truth.” Confucius could maintain that he had discovered a new and uplifting form of life, but Jesus said, “I *am* the life.” And thus, we are either with Jesus or we are against him. No other founder forces that choice as clearly as Jesus does.

And one more thing, no other Religious figure has ever risen from the dead. Especially after such a horrible and debasing death which shattered the faith and love of those who believed in him. No. The resurrection is unique in all the history of the world. The resurrection changed the history of the world. If we put our faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah who died but now lives—forever—then we too have the possibility to live as he lived, and also to rise as he rose. It is not just about believing and living what he taught. It is fundamentally believing in who Jesus is. And once we get that clearly the other aspects of our life fall into the proper place.

And that is why we gather here. That is why we come to Mass and worship. That is why we receive the sacrament of the Eucharist. That is why we go to confession. That is why we try to live with a care and a devotion for one another. That is why we lay down our lives for our loved ones. That is why we strive to welcome the stranger. These are the things that Jesus himself did. We live his way. Because we believe He is who He said He is. The Son of God. The One who brings forgiveness. The One whose love feeds us on our journey through life. Yes, Jesus is that One. And we believe in Him and we love. Him.

May He bless us today and give us his peace.