

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Is. 50: 5-9; Ps. 116; Ja. 2: 14-18; Mk. 8: 27-35

We are counting down the final days of a very short election campaign and every day we are treated to the latest polling numbers. Who do the Canadian people want to be the next Prime Minister? What political party will the people be supporting? These opinions are important to the political parties to determine if their campaign strategy is working or if it needs to be changed to attract more voters.

Jesus conducted an informal poll among His disciples even though He was not running for political office nor was He about to change His message to suit the people. He asked: 'Who do people say that I am?' His disciples told Him that people were saying that He was John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the other prophets.

Then Jesus revealed the real question: 'Who do you say that I am?' This was a more difficult question to answer because it was directed at each person individually. No doubt, there was a lot of stammering and murmuring as the disciples searched for the proper answer. Finally, in a moment of divinely inspired insight, Peter blurted out: 'You are the Christ.'

When Jesus followed up by saying that He would undergo great suffering, be rejected by the elders, and ultimately be killed, Peter could not take it. This was totally in contrast with the triumphant and royal Messiah that Peter envisioned. When he rebuked Jesus for saying these things, Jesus told Peter that he was still thinking as humans think and had not learned the ways of God.

Then He clearly explained that if anyone wanted to call himself His disciple, he must 'deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.' He made it clear to Peter that to follow Him would mean sacrifice. It would not be easy.

This is the message that Jesus brings to us. It is not a message that will put Him at the top of the polls but it is one that transcends our earthly cares and concerns and addresses our life for eternity.

Although he may not have fully understood what he was saying, Peter answered Jesus' question. We are called to answer Jesus' question for ourselves. Who is Jesus for us? Are we prepared to do what is required to be His disciple and to follow Him? Do we think of Him as a 'rock star' leading a pack of admiring fans or do we realize that, by following Him, we too will have to be prepared to endure humiliation and persecution if we live in accordance with His teachings.

Jesus suffered and died, rose again, and ascended into heaven. We have been taught from an early age that we want to follow Him all the way to heaven. But sometimes we forget that, before the triumphant ascension into heaven, there was the suffering and death. Jesus says that we must sacrifice our lives for His sake and for the sake of the Gospel for us to be saved.

Jesus' message may seem very harsh and difficult; especially when we read the prophesy of the suffering to be endured as described in the First Reading. But Isaiah offers these comforting words: 'The Lord God helps me...He who vindicates me is near...It is the Lord God who helps me.' God is near to us to help us in our sufferings as we 'set our faces like flint' (Is. 50: 7) and remain faithful and steadfast in following our Messiah, Jesus.