



It seems as if Jesus is taking an opinion poll in the Gospel today or He is creating a focus group out of His disciples. Who do the crowds say that I am? Doesn't that sound like a question that a rock star or an actress might ask in order to inflate their own ego? What are people saying about me?

But, of course, Jesus has no need of inflating His own ego. So why does He pose this question to the disciples? As always, Jesus asks them this in order to teach them and to draw them to deeper faith. "Who do they say that I am?" "What is your belief about Me?"

Peter gets it right, as we heard, "You are the Christ of God". That word, Christ, comes from Greek, *Christos* and it means anointed one. So, "you are the anointed one of God." Well what does that mean? Anointed here means anointed with oil, a consecration.

In the Old Testament, there were three groups who were anointed: priests, prophets, and kings. Priests were anointed, consecrated in order to offer sacrifice to God. Bulls, goats, birds: these were the holocaust offerings given by the people as a sign of their obedience and loyalty to God. But they couldn't just go and offer these things. The offerings had to be made by the priests, by those consecrated, and anointed for this service.

Prophets were anointed because they had a special mission to proclaim God's word to the people. Kings were anointed to rule over God's people. In fact, in Israel they became King at the moment of anointing. Power and authority to rule was awarded them.

Jesus – anointed one of God. Fully and perfectly priest, prophet and King of the universe. As Priest, He offers the perfect sacrifice of Himself to expiate our sins. As Prophet He is the Word of God which is proclaimed to us. As King, He is perfect in power and authority to rule the universe.

So that the disciples wouldn't get the wrong idea here, once Peter proclaims Jesus to be the anointed one of God, Jesus immediately explains to them what that means. Not that He will reign as an earthly King does, but rather that He would suffer, die, and rise again. This is how His Messiahship is to be carried out, by giving Himself for our salvation. Then further, He says

to the disciples and to us, “If you wish to be my disciple, you too must take up your cross every day and follow me.”

So Jesus, I think, asks us two questions: “Who do you say that I am?” Think about that for a minute. How would you answer Jesus if He asked you that question? “Who do you say that I am?”

Unfortunately, some might say, if they are being honest, “Oh you are just someone that I pay attention to a few minutes a day.” Or – “Oh you have some nice teachings, but some I don’t pay attention to because they are hard.” Maybe all of us have fallen into this once in a while.

What Jesus wants us to respond is “You are the Lord of my life. You are the Messiah; You are the anointed one of God.” If we say we believe this and then are unwilling to carry our cross each day, then we really are not a follower of Christ.

St. John Vianney, the great and holy French priest – who we have invoked during this Year for Priests which just ended – said this in very strong terms:

“There is no doubt about it: a person who loves pleasure, who seeks comfort, who flies from anything that might spell suffering, who is over-anxious, who complains, who blames and becomes impatient at the least little things which do not go his way – a person like that is a Christian only in name. He is a dishonor to his religion, for Jesus Christ has said so: Anyone who wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross every day of his life and follow Me.”

I have been that person and if you’re honest, I bet that you can say that you have been that person too; but we can be good Christians still, by recommitting ourselves every day to taking up our cross, by not seeking the easy way out, but by being willing – with cross in hand every day – to follow Jesus, the anointed one of God.

**Father Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua Catholic Church, South Bend, Indiana  
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