

**And what will we mean?**

Here we are, faced with one of the most intimate moments of the Gospel, so much so, that Jesus tells the disciples not to talk about it, and yet it is one of those life changing moments, one that confronts us still today with a challenging reality: do the words we say, mean what they mean? And the answer to this, even today, is not that clear. We may say the words that should be said, but do they mean what we think?

The scene begins when the disciples and Jesus are walking, and he suddenly ask them what they have heard from the people about him. And this is valid question, considering that he has driven out evil spirits, he has healed many: a demon possessed man, a sick woman, given back life to a dead girl, he feeds a multitude, walked on water, healed a deaf and mute man... Just to look at the titles of the sections before today's reading. And the response he gets sort of makes sense: the people think of Jesus as John the Baptist who was recently murdered, other say he could be Elijah, or another prophet. Reasonable enough wouldn't you agree?

But what follows is not hearsay, it involved them: who do you say I am? **What would be our answer?**

Once again, Peter jumps in - "you are the Messiah". And that is quite different. Messiah is a Hebrew word *meshiach* which means 'God's chosen', and as chosen then anointed. When translated into Greek the word became *christos*. And so entered our vocabulary and has ended up as if it were Jesus' second name: Jesus Christ. When in reality it is not a name but a title and would better be 'Jesus the Christ'. This is so radical, that Jesus tells the disciples to be quiet about it, no to say anything. This has been called by the experts Jesus' messianic secret. It is only during his trial in Mark 14: 61 when asked by the High Priest: "Are you the Christ?" do we hear Jesus' answer: "I am".

After Peter's confession, Jesus then tells them what this really means: suffering, rejection, pain, death, and resurrection. That is what being the Messiah was all about. This was the only way there would be deliverance and new life. Peter is horrified when he hears this; this is not what he sees as Messiah, and rebukes Jesus. Peter cannot accept a Messiah who suffers, who will die. And so, Peter goes from the first to ever proclaim this messianic reality, to be called 'Satan = the opposer'. How can this happen? And that goes back to my initial thoughts on the meaning of the words we use.

You see, to Peter and many like him, Messiah was the long expected triumphant manifestation of the kingdom being established. The victory over oppression, in this case the Roman Empire. The Messiah was not a suffering, rejected, dying experience. Yet, when we read the prophets, that is exactly what we find, even if it is not what the people wanted. Peter then goes from hope to opposition simply because he wants things to mean what he wants them to mean. So, when we talk of Jesus Christ, the Messiah - what are we talking about? What does it mean to us?

Are we running the risk of setting our mind on human things and not God things? I sometimes believe this is the case. When we reduce our faith to what suits us and has little to do with what God wants then we are replicating this reading - we use the words, but not how they are meant to be used. What makes Jesus the Christ? The proclamation of the kingdom of God where solidarity, commitment, life in fullness for all, hope...all these are a reality. Where no person is neglected, excluded because of race, gender, sexual orientation, language, economic worth. Where there are no longer those in and those out, but a new reality is being created. As Paul will later say: where there is no Gentile or Jew, male or female, slave or free.

And this is the reason why Jesus is despised, rejected, crucified. The Empire cannot allow this vision to happen, they must put an end to it before people start getting ideas... But God proclaims Jesus as the Christ, in the resurrection. We are called to love and serve others, to affirm justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus crucified and risen as our judge and our hope. Yes, this is Jesus being the Christ. Is it what we mean when we say those words?

*Lose your shyness, find your tongue; tell the world what God has done:*

*God in Christ has come to stay, we can see his power today. Amen*