

Homily 27th August 2023 Trinity 12

Isaiah 51.1-6, Romans 12.1-8, Matthew 16.13-20

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The Gospel writers task is to tell us about Jesus who he is and what he did, his mission and our calling to follow.

Matthew's Gospel starts right at the beginning with his family tree, his birth at Bethlehem, and it builds up through recognising him as Emmanuel God with us through teaching and healing and parable to the key verse in today's Gospel reading which is Simon Peter's answer to Jesus "Who do you say that I am" - "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. **It is a wonderful moment** though short lived.

His disciples have come to know him personally. Now, he asks them to say, to tell him just what it is they believe about him.

Because knowing "who Jesus is" is not just knowing information about Jesus; it is knowing Jesus within ourselves personally. Almost everyone has heard about Jesus. But relatively few of us truly know Jesus, inwardly with mind and spirit, even amongst Christians and this is really important, because knowing "who Jesus is" is essential for our salvation; it is a matter of life and death.

John 17:3 says, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Those who know God and Jesus Christ have eternal life.

So the heart of Christian living is to know and to love Jesus personally. Many people think of the Christian life just in terms of activities: meetings, rituals, ceremonies, works of ministry, and charity and so on. But the heart of the Christian life is to know and love Jesus and to have a personal living relationship with him.. It is about being, not doing, and this leads us to follow him and to grow spiritually into his image. Like a friend or a brother, it's the quality of the relationship that makes it, our alignment towards and with Jesus.

We know many of the people of his generation saw Jesus as a great prophet from God. However, they didn't really understand who Jesus was. Jesus is more, much more than a great prophet.

IN our reading today Jesus clearly expected a better understanding from his disciples. So he asked, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" and Simon Peter was inspired, he said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" So what does that mean...? Traditionally in the Hebrew Scriptures, to be messiah is to be God's anointed, a great war leader

who will make Israel Great Again, along with many other expectations of great work to do, to be son of the living God is new, means that Jesus was more than a man; he was God in the flesh. Jesus was both human and divine. So how did Peter know?

The answer comes in verse 17. "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven." Peter did not come to this recognition because he had perfect understanding or through his own efforts; it was revealed to him by God. As Paul points out in his letter 1 Corinthians 12:3 says, "...no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." When anyone recognises or confesses that Jesus is Lord from their hearts it is the work of the Holy Spirit; God makes them, us, his children.

Jesus knowing what was to come, uses the opportunity of Peter's insight to speak about the future, which involves Peter as the rock on which the future Church will be founded, and the keeper of the keys to the Kingdom of heaven.

A glorious vision, but not easy for Peter or for us to understand, we know the words but have not yet experienced the reality, we have not seen, but we have faith in the vision of things to come. Our passage today does not take us to v22 but Peter goes from inspired understanding at Caesarea Philippi, to complete failure to understand Jesus's mission, or what kind of Messiah Jesus is, in the space of a couple of verses, he gets it wrong and is rebuked by Jesus for denying even the possibility of the Cross and the Passion ahead.

He is not perfect; the gospels are about real human beings imperfect and continually making mistakes on their journey and yet growing and it is to be hoped, for all of us, learning from them. This is just the beginning of Peter's understanding and of ours.

We know that Peter does get there in the end, despite not understanding the transfiguration, despite denying Jesus after Gethsemane and running away with the others and hiding. He is our reassuring example of one who makes mistakes and yet grows in knowledge and stature to the end of his life.

The knowledge of God and love for God are for all us always a work in progress. No one achieves perfection in this life we have to wait for the life to come.

Like Peter, we too have to be transformed, to grow in wisdom and understanding and love for the Lord Jesus.

As Paul reminds the Romans we need to be changing and growing as

we follow Jesus “Do not be conformed to this world, he says, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern, that is find out, what is the will of God, and do it—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Not being conformed to this world is really, really difficult. The world distracts us continually and encourages us to look the other way, rather than so much as catch a glimpse the injustice, hatred, oppression, immorality, greed, and violence that surround us and oppress others. It takes transformation, renewal of the mind, to detach ourselves from the world’s distractions and its attractions towards things that do not matter. Paul implores us, and the Romans, to shake off the effects of this world, to attend to the things that do matter, and “discern ... the will of God, what is good, acceptable, and perfect”

Paul reminds us that we are, not only individuals, but also members of the body of Christ, and so we are all called to —to different forms of ministry, teaching, challenging and encouraging, giving, leading, and being compassionate with cheerfulness in the world. We can each do some of those things alone, but we do all of them better with more discernment and impact as part of a larger body. No one has all the gifts to bring in the kingdom of God, singlehandedly, or to do it all. No single community can do it all, either.

But God empowers each individual and community to offer our gifts to one another, and to God himself and all we are called to do it in our particular places and contexts. As St Francis said to his brothers at the end of his life I have done that which was mine to do , may Christ now teach you what you are to do.

We are given different gifts in order to make that happen “according to the grace given to us”. It is grace, the endless mercies of God , as God’s transforming power, that enables the renewing of our minds, that sets us all in motion, shows us and points us towards those things that are good, acceptable, and perfect.

and still

When or if it does all go wrong we still have the historic assurance that the prophet Isaiah gave to the exiles in Babylon, keeping hope and faith alive. In the past God has cared for his people, leading Abraham and Sarah to a new land and many descendants and bringing the slaves out of Egypt to the promised land, and God still cares. This is Isaiah’s message from God, basically hold on and trust in God’s love and care

“my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended. We live as they say in difficult, and interesting times, but as we receive and remember God’s grace, mercies and blessings, times will change and we will learn and grow.

So we pray

O God of constant mercy, who sent your son to save us, remind us of your goodness, increase your grace within us, that our thankfulness may grow. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen