

## St Pius-St Anthony 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2nd

Don't you dread those conversations that begin- "Can I be honest with you?" Usually, we think 'Oh, no, what is next?' But what a funny question. I always say, "Of course, what am I supposed to say, 'No, lie to me' or worse yet 'Now you have me thinking you normally you don't tell me the truth.'" But we all know what they mean. Someone has something really sensitive to talk to us about, or something hard to say, they feel need to tell us about. That type question, is Jesus' conversation opener to the apostles today. First, he eases into the conversation by saying, 'What is the word on the street about me?' Then after such a warm-up He gets down to business asking them much more personally, "So, what do you think about me?" Doesn't that question remind you of 'Does my haircut look okay?' or "How does this dress I just bought look on me?" A whole lot is going to hang on the words that follow such a question! We would be wise to pause and consider carefully our response (of course, Peter doesn't). But such a high importance question is what Jesus is asking today. Who do you say I am? Jesus is asking one of the 'defining moment' questions, that happen at times in all deep relationships: Who am I to you-what do I mean to you?

I apologize up front and going ahead to confess now that I am known to accidentally force such questions upon people, when I may be animatedly talking to a couple about things and then veer into their business maybe by Asking, "What brought you all together-How long have you been married-what is your anniversary day?" And the lady leans back and says, "Yes, honey, when is our anniversary?" His eyes tell me, 'Oops, I did it again.' But we all size that up quickly: Pause, and think a minute because a whole lot depends upon that answer. Jesus drops just such a question today.

You may be asking, 'Haven't we just heard this gospel not long ago?' I think it shows how important the question is that it comes up every year in our three year reading cycle in mass with Matthew/Luke & Mark's gospel.

So, Jesus lays it out there asking, "What do I mean to you?" Peter rushes right in, (Fortunately maybe for the other 11 apostles but for Peter, unfortunately because now more is expected of him). Peter says, "You are the Christ". The team of apostles should say after that, "Good answer, good answer" (as in Family Feud game show!) Jesus does nod approvingly to Peter's divine insight. Peter has figured out Jesus' identity-mission (for a few seconds). Because the next step in this drama- Jesus goes on to specify just what kind of messiah He is. He shuns abusive power over others, the vanity of a spotlight and proud glory. Jesus says as Messiah, He will humbly serve? He will

suffer? And as Messiah even later die for his own people. Something that Jesus teaches about being a good sacrificial Savior, makes Peter draw back, be repulsed and leads Peter to put Jesus down by correcting Jesus' version of being a messiah (Why does Peter presume to tell Jesus off (word used is 'Peter rebuked Jesus')? Does it say more about Peter-Has he figured that if we follow Jesus, and Jesus does that –suffer for others- they are going to expect it from us, too? So, Peter arrogantly begins to tell Jesus how to be a Messiah. Instead of wisely just hearing Jesus out, taking a pause to consider the long-term consequences of what he was about to say, Peter jumps right out of the pan and into the fire, presumptively telling Jesus how to be Jesus. And of course, Jesus puts Peter into his place. The 'Get behind me' part is strong enough, but Jesus goes on even to say, "Peter, that is something I expect from Satan, not you". That detail confirms for us that such acts of redefining Messiahship for Jesus is what Satan was putting on Jesus with the temptations in the desert back at the beginning of gospels. That is how Satan tried seducing Jesus back in the desert wilderness: the attitude of 'I'll tell Jesus how to be God!' That is not going to work!

Since Peter was getting out ahead of Jesus in this master-disciple march forward, Peter slipping out around the side of Jesus, Jesus tells him 'Peter, get behind-get back in line behind me –get in line with the Father's will'. I have heard this gospel referred to as the rise and fall of Peter (not the first & won't be last- is that why we like Peter?) Or the Peter's one act play from commendation to condemnation (his hero to zero episode!) How human is Peter? To even get a-head of himself (full of himself), but Peter's strength is that he does know to humble himself, accept correction and strive again to be bettered by God's grace!

But before we come down so harshly on Peter, what is our response to Jesus' question? Who do we say Jesus must be, for us? Are we accepting of Jesus' desire for our discipleship on his terms-not just what we want? In the gospel, Jesus takes this opportunity further detail what discipleship with Him looks like. He teaches that disciples deny their own selfish wishes/wants, taking up their cross and serving others. For example, following Jesus means that since he washed others' feet, so are we. Since he forgave without end, so are we. Since he accepted hard work for others' good, so are we. His spiritual principle here is that even with our souls, 'no pain-no gain'. These directions of Jesus give us an idea of what Peter's specific words of rebuke were. Likely, Peter was looking for easy street, not the way of the cross but the big easy. As if Peter told Him, "Good Jesus,-with you the Messiah- we

are going to take the town, show off to others, and revel in luxury. To which Jesus says, 'No, you are all wrong- I am the Messiah who suffers and gives my life in place of my people's (I will die for you), I will build up, bring people together myself by bridging the gap and sacrificing myself for their life. Jesus points the way to discipleship as a willing work and gift to others- not a getting ahead of others at their expense by putting them down, but rather a 'getting behind' them as a supporting and encouraging them along, maybe even allowing that they stand on us to be raised up. It doesn't have to be said, but following Jesus isn't easy. We may want to be hard on Peter and the apostles for missing this mark (for example, I like to point out that Jesus in this one gospel of Mark, will repeat this teaching of what kind of messiah He is (and by extension-how we are to be disciples) THREE times in Mark 8:31, 9:30-31, & 10:33-34. And they still have their run off sprints from Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Yet, the most important question is the one directed at us? Who is Jesus to us? Do we take very well to this teaching of Jesus on living out the cross (daily carrying it-postponing our pleasures for His Kingdom to come). Before we judge harshly the apostles, how are we doing accepting Jesus on His terms? How willing are we to 'deny ourselves' (put others ahead), take up cross (accepting hard things from others) and truly follow Jesus- living as God wills, not as the world would tell us, but as Jesus shows us.