Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Gospel text (*Mk* 8:27-35): Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Christ." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him.

He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

"Whoever wishes to come after me... take up his cross, and follow me"

Fr. Antoni CAROL i Hostench
(Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain)

Today we encounter situations similar to those described in this Gospel passage. If God were to ask us right now, "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27), we would have to report all kinds of responses, some even quite strange. A quick look at what is being aired in various media would give us a clear picture. Yet... more than twenty centuries of 'Church time' have passed. After all these years, we grieve and, like Saint Faustina, we complain to Jesus: 'Why is the number of those who know You still so small?'

On that occasion, when Simon Peter made his confession of faith, Jesus "warned them not to tell anyone about him" (Mark 8:30). His messianic identity had to be revealed to the Jewish people progressively. Later, the climactic moment would come when Jesus Christ would declare—once and for all—that He was the Messiah: "I am" (Luke 22:70). Since then, there is no excuse for not declaring or acknowledging Him as

the Son of God, who came into the world for our salvation. Even more so, all baptized Christians have the joyful ‘priestly’ duty to preach the Gospel to all nations and to all creatures (cf. Mark 16:15). This call to proclaim the Good News is all the more urgent when we consider that all sorts of mistaken, even blasphemous, opinions are still being spread about Him.

However, the proclamation of His messiahship and the coming of His Kingdom must pass through the Cross. Indeed, Jesus Christ “began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly” (Mark 8:31), and the Catechism reminds us that ‘the Church progresses on her pilgrimage amidst the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God’ (n. 769). This is the path to follow Christ and to make Him known: “Whoever wishes to come after me… take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “The triumph of the cross enlightened all who suffered the blindness of sin, freed us all from the bonds of sin, redeemed all men. Therefore, we must not be ashamed of the cross of the Savior” (Saint Cyril of Jerusalem)

- “God chooses the way of the transformation of hearts in suffering and in humility. And we, like Peter, must convert, over and over again” (Benedict XVI)

- “… Jesus' sufferings took their historical, concrete form from the fact that he was "rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes" (Mk 8:31), who handed "him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified"(Mt 20:19)” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 572)