Thursday of the Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mk* 8:27-33): 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 Messiah.” 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.”

“Who do people say that I am?... But who do you say that I am?”

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Today we continue to listen to the Word of God with the help of the Gospel of Saint Mark. A Gospel with a very clear concern: to discover who this Jesus of Nazareth is. Mark has been offering us, through his texts, the reaction of different characters before Jesus: the sick, the disciples, the scribes and Pharisees. Today he asks us directly: "But who do you say that I am?" (Mk 8:29).

Certainly, those of us who call ourselves Christians have the fundamental duty to discover our identity in order to give an account of our faith, being good witnesses with our lives. This duty urges us to be able to transmit a clear and understandable message to our brothers and sisters who can find in Jesus a Word of Life that gives meaning to everything they think, say and do. But this testimony must begin with us being aware of our personal encounter with Him. John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter "Novo millennio ineunte," wrote to us: "Our witness, however, would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first contemplated his face."

With this text, Saint Mark offers us a good path of contemplation of Jesus. First, Jesus asks us what people say He is; and we can answer, like the disciples: John the Baptist, Elijah, an important, good, attractive character. A good answer, no doubt, but still far from the Truth of Jesus. He asks us: “But who do you say

that I am?” (Mk 8:29). It is the question of faith, of personal involvement. We only find the answer in the experience of silence and prayer. It is the path of faith that Peter follows, and the one that we must also follow.

Brothers and sisters, let us experience through our prayer the liberating presence of God's love present in our lives. He continues to make a covenant with us with clear signs of his presence, like that bow in the clouds promised to Noah.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "Was it necessary for the Son of God to suffer for us? It was, certainly, and for two reasons that are easy to deduce: one, to remedy our sins; the other, to give us an example of how we should act" (Saint Thomas Aquinas)

- "Christians must continuously be instructed, over the centuries, by the Lord, to make them aware that their path is not that of glory and worldly powers, but ‘the path of the cross’" (Benedict XVI)

- "It is love ‘to the end’ (Jn 13:1) that confers on Christ's sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction. He knew and loved us all when he offered his life (...). No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all (...)." (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 616)