



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

June 23, 2013

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel reading Luke 9:18-24 [To be read aloud]

Once when Jesus was praying in solitude, and the disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” They said in reply, “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, ‘One of the ancient prophets has arisen.’” Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter said in reply, “The Christ of God.” He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone. He said, “The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.” Then he said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

Brief commentary:

Following Jesus Christ is wholly different from following a hero, the founder of a movement or even of a religion; it is more than following an idea or ideal, and especially much more than following a star or a celebrity. Following Jesus Christ is radically different, because of *whom* he is. Jesus is the Lord. As such, following him implies ultimate claims on us in a way that nothing else rightfully can. This is the heart of today’s reading. Jesus himself asks his disciples two questions. The first is a general one. It regards rumors and third person reports circulating about him as a consequence of his extraordinary mission in the Galilee, which has galvanized crowds and stirred great interest. It is a question about popular opinion: “Who do the crowds say that I am?” It is a question that we can very well ask in our own society. The responses to this question in our world are multiple: a holy man, a prophet, a social reformer, the founder of Christianity, a critic of the status quo, a visionary, etc. Jesus is also a pop icon, and as such enjoys great popularity on the cover of news magazines, controversial books and movies, the Internet, history programs on television, and so on. Some people, feeling threatened by the commanding person of the Jesus of the Gospels, attempt to domesticate and mellow him by turning him into a pious figure or regular guy. Yet, no one is executed on a Roman cross for being simply “a nice guy.” Jesus is different. What we believe about Jesus has real implications for our lives, because what we believe really does matter. What we believe has real consequences in the way we perceive life, as well as on our thinking and on our values (what is important to us), on our attitudes, decisions and choices, on how we devote our time and talents and resources; indeed, it has implications on how we live our lives, treat others, and the sort of persons we become. The second question Jesus asks is far more direct, and calls for a personal first-person ‘response, which no one can make in our stead’: “*But* who do *you* say that I am?” Peter’s response is the response of the Christian Church: “The Christ of God.” This is a singular and unique title belonging only to the One who, “without ceasing to be God, became like one of us in all things except in [the inhumanity which is] sin.” Jesus is thus the One ‘who is Love’ among us. Thus, to follow Jesus Christ, involves a radical response like no other. It involves a resolute wholehearted commitment to the point of self-sacrifice, suffering, rejection and humiliation: *the cross*. Though innocent, Jesus will be crucified like a common sinner and criminal. Therefore, his disciples must likewise be so devoted to the cause of the Gospel and of the Kingdom of God that they are ready to suffer even extreme consequences for bearing witness to Christ, living his Gospel, and proclaiming it in their mission to a world in dire need of salvation. In many ways, today’s Gospel reading is at the heart of the Gospel of discipleship: follow Jesus Christ with full heart, soul, mind, strength, joyfully, completely, generously, loyally, heroically, resolutely, without hesitation or compromise: “whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” It is also the Gospel of profession of faith and witness of faith: “Who do you say that I am?” It is the Gospel of decision and commitment: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” To follow Jesus thus means to experience his saving love and be committed to loving in concrete every day ways with this very love that has transformed our lives and very selves, the love of the One who loved us all the way to the cross.

Today’s reading offers significant messages:

- The core of Christian discipleship involves an experience, conviction and profession of who and what Jesus Christ is. Much more than a set of ideals or creedal formulae, Christianity is grounded not in *something*, but in *Someone*, the ‘Christ of God’.
- Although many popular opinions circulate about Jesus, only the Church and her Gospels bear witness to the meaning and truth of who Jesus is and what he has achieved.
- Following Jesus Christ involves “taking up our cross,” which is a radical commitment ready to go to the extent of ridicule and suffering for the sake of the Gospel and the cause of the Kingdom of God, just as Jesus was willing to suffer on our behalf to redeem us.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- Who do I say Jesus is?
- How can I learn more about the meaning and significance of who Jesus is and what Jesus did?
- Is my commitment to Jesus and his Gospel as radical as willing to be subject to ridicule and suffering?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 2012-29