

21st Sunday A (Matt 16:13-20)

Whenever people ask me a question, they sometimes preface it by saying, "I hope you don't think this is a silly question." I always respond, "There's no such thing as a silly question." Bernard Lonergan, a prominent Jesuit philosopher, said that human beings are basically curious people, and that they are always asking questions. We are never satisfied with answers for very long, and we keep coming up with new questions, and arriving at new insights. In fact, Lonergan wrote a fat philosophy book entitled *INSIGHT*, where he explains in great detail how his theory of human curiosity and thinking works.

As Jesus walked among us two thousand years ago, he too was a curious human being, and he asked questions. In today's Gospel, Jesus was curious about who people thought he was, and so he asked questions of his disciples. "Who do people say that I am?" Some John the baptizer or one of the major prophets of Israel returned from the dead. Then Jesus asked the important question of his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Spontaneous Peter responds with a proclamation of faith. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

As curious, questioning people, Jesus asks us the same question, "Who do you say that I am?" This incident in today's Gospel teaches us that the most important, the most crucial question in life is: Who do you say that Jesus is? That means that our first task in life is not to be successful, or wise, or happy- or even holy. The first task of the Christian is to discover Christ Jesus.

St. Ignatius Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* urges us to pray for an ever deeper knowledge of Jesus, and as this knowledge of him deepens, we begin to discover his beauty and loveableness. The intensity of our love grows, as does our desire to serve him and those he loves more faithfully and selflessly.

Our answer to the question of Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" may vary from time to time in our lives, depending on the situations we may find ourselves in. In a time of crisis or sickness, Jesus may be the one who gathers us to himself as he did the little children, or he may be the healer for us as he was for the man born blind, or the many lepers he cured. The response of others in a troubled marriage may be that Jesus is the one who sustains them as they seek counseling to rebuild their marriage. "Who do you say that I am?" he asks the aged and lonely, and his consoling, loving presence may be their answer as they allow themselves to be touched by those who bring Holy Communion to them or who pray with them, who become Jesus to them. For parents wanting to strengthen their relationship with each other and their children, Jesus may be the one who gives them courage to risk communicating more lovingly, and to share feelings without being afraid. For the divorced and those who have suffered ruptured relationships, Jesus may be for them the one who never rejects or abandons them, and who gives them courage to begin a new life. For young people, Jesus for you may be the one who moves you to reach out to your fellow students or companions who are in need of a friend.

Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" We can answer, "All of the above and more." This is what Peter means when he calls Jesus "the Messiah and the son of the Living God." Jesus is the one who came to liberate us from what drags us down and crushes us. He came to free us from sin and selfishness and fear of death through his life, death and resurrection. He is the one who reveals to us the astounding unconditional love of his Father for each one of us. He is the one who invites us to use his familiar name, "Abba" daddy, for his Father and our loving Heavenly Father who loves us more deeply than we know.

We are the people who give thanks for this gift of love embodied in our brother, Jesus. He is the son of the Living God whose very body and blood we share at this Eucharistic meal in which he asks us never to forget him and his love for us, but to remember him for all time. Amen.

Al Grosskopf, S.J.