



Sunday 23rd August 2026

The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Gospel Reading

Matthew 16.13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Other readings: Exodus 1.8—2.10, Psalm 124, Romans 12.1—8, Matthew 16.13—20

Homily

According to Luke, Jesus was alone with the Twelve and, after praying, he asked them, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" It's a big question and one that is asked by many today. How well do *we* understand who Jesus is? As the disciples shared, there are many differing views in the world. Perhaps Jesus never existed or, he was just an historical figure, an influential religious leader, perhaps another prophet or holy man.

The Christian Church, however, is founded upon Jesus' identity and his God-given mission; 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' The three synoptic Gospels, (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), record this episode in detail, indicating its radical importance. It is foundational to understanding the significance and scope of Jesus' ministry, and the nature and purpose of his Church. Without this revelatory foundation, there is no Gospel message to share, no salvation to be had, no Church or Body of which to be a part, no purpose or authority to preach or minister. As Christians, our spiritual identity, faith and purpose all depend upon this rock; "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!"

This episode occurs well into Jesus' ministry. Many had responded to his call to follow. The Twelve had been commissioned and, as he lived with them, he trained them in preaching the Kingdom in words and works. Had they now seen and experienced enough to realise just who Jesus truly was? A teacher, a prophet, or the promised Messiah - the Son of God?

The utterance from Simon Peter showed no hint of doubt; he knew who this man Jesus was, and in making his proclamation, he was blessed. “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.” Jesus’ words show that we need more than our own instincts, head knowledge, and even experience of Church to grasp who Jesus truly is. Belonging to a Christian community, attending worship, receiving teaching, exhibiting moral and kind living, searching, praying, certainly help our journey, but it takes a personal revelation for us to recognise just *who* Jesus truly is; and this revelation turns head-knowledge into living faith. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit is still touching the heart and soul of seekers throughout the world – inspiring living faith.

Peter spoke for himself and the others, and was changed – even his name. Remember, it is here in this moment that Jesus makes a word-play on Peter’s name (*Petros, or Cephas*), meaning stone, or rock, and made him the foundational Rock (*Petra*) upon which the Church is built. Jesus declares that his growing Church, built on this Rock, will overcome ‘the gates of Hades’ – representing the barriers resisting and opposing the Church’s expansion into fresh communities and spiritual strongholds. If the Church grows in obedience to Jesus’ message and mission, the Kingdom of God will advance into new areas, bringing the knowledge of salvation to untouched communities. The ‘keys’ represent power to ‘unlock’ difficult situations, to free people from spiritual oppression, or to “lock” or “bind” those evil influences. Jesus conferred that authority on the Church, to use according to his direction.

After the disciples declare that Jesus is the Messiah, he ‘sternly orders them’ not to tell anyone! Similarly, after his transfiguration, he tells them not to talk about what they saw and heard until after his resurrection. Why bind them to secrecy? This is the greatest message to be shouted from the rooftops! It is a matter of timing. Jesus would make his Messianic claim public at the right time, in Jerusalem and in Passover week. He had much yet to teach the disciples before embarking on his last journey to Jerusalem, to becoming “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world”. The crowds were eager to follow an earthly messiah, a revolutionary and military leader to expel the Romans and replace the corrupt political establishment. However, Jesus was not that kind of messiah. He told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world”; his way is very different. Following today’s episode, his teaching explicitly turns towards his rejection, suffering, and the cross, (verse 21).

Back to the beginning and the question, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Our world, and the society in which we live is full of uncertainties, half-truths, deliberate mis-truths, (lies), and muddled thinking; we can be “Like sheep without a shepherd.” We need to pray for a fresh revelation of Jesus’ divine identity, authority and purpose; and it will be that revelation, from the Holy Spirit, which will inspire *us* to living faith and commitment to Jesus – empowering us to our own discipleship vocations of sharing an effective witness and spiritual ministry to a needy world. Amen.

Conversation Questions

1. Revelation is mysterious. Some have never doubted, for some, faith comes gradually, for others it can be dramatic. It is always life-changing. Have you ever shared your journey with God, your testimony of faith? Could you share something of the reason you believe in Jesus as the risen Lord with someone new in the next few weeks?
2. Our expectations and confidence depend upon understanding just who Jesus is. Weak understanding = shaky faith. Clear understanding boosts our faith in Jesus, giving us confidence in daily living, worship, witness and service. How do we prioritise time to invest in knowing Jesus better?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*Almighty and everlasting God,
you are always more ready to hear than we to pray
and to give more than either we desire or deserve:
pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy,
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid
and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask
but through the merits and mediation
of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(or)

*God of constant mercy,
who sent your Son to save us:
remind us of your goodness,
increase your grace within us,
that our thankfulness may grow,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

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