

Who do you say I am?" (A reflection about having a deeper sense of ourselves, as we ponder an intuitive response to the question Jesus poses us, "Who do you say I am?")

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A reflection about having a deeper sense of ourselves as we ponder an intuitive response to the question Jesus poses to us, "Who do you say I am?"

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I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Let us pray:

O God, who declares thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.

An extract from today's Gospel reading:

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked?

"Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

(Matt 16: 13 – 16)

My uncle is a rather intense man.

He is bright, loving and caring but intense.

John, who now resides in the UK, originally did his Masters in Psychology at UCT and then went on to teach at both the University of Zululand and Rhodes University in Grahamstown, now Makhanda.

He was then fortunate to spend time at Tavistock, in London, a centre for excellence in Psychology.

I lost touch with him for a few years and then one day back in 2003, I was privileged to visit the UK on a family trip and was invited to visit him and his family for lunch.

I was very interested in how his academic and professional career had progressed and so I asked John to explain to me how the process works of becoming a psycho-analyst. I had assumed, incorrectly so, that John had to have a PhD in Psychology in order to become a registered psycho-analyst.

“Oh no,” he replied to me.

“I only have a Masters in psychology.”

I must have seemed quite surprised, for he continued to explain...

“You see, it’s all about the journey.”

“The journey?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said.

“In order to become a psycho-analyst, you first have to go through your own analysis. This can take a different time for everybody. You can’t possibly become a psycho-analyst without first fully understanding yourself, your own formation, weakness and strengths, bias and perceptions, your personality and how you think.”

“Ah,” I replied, trying to take it all in at once.

I know that John became a very successful psycho-analyst in London, helping many people work through their issues and challenges over many years.

I salute him.

However, I have never forgotten that conversation that I had with him. It has somehow stuck in my psyche since 2003 and the moment I read the Gospel reading set for this morning, I was reminded at once of the conversation we shared.

You see, Jesus asks the question to His disciples, “Who do you say I am?”

Perhaps to fully appreciate and understand the dynamics and power of this question, we need to imagine for a moment that Jesus is asking each and every one of us that very same question on a personal basis.

“Darron, who do you say I am?”

Now the question becomes very personal and interesting. For how do I reply?

How do I reply?

Can I reply?

Do I actually have the words and capacity to reply?

Well, yes and no.

Let’s unpack a few ideas around this.

On the one hand, can I really answer the question Jesus is asking me if I don’t have a full and complete understanding of myself?

To be honest, do we ever really know and understand ourselves fully, anyway? Life is a journey and the enlightened who work at growing and developing their soul, remain open to change and becoming mature in the lessons that life offers us.

However, if we are to be very honest with ourselves, when we answer the question that Jesus asks us, “Who do you say I am?” I think we need to be open about a few things, like:

- Firstly, we need to acknowledge that we are broken. We cannot hope to be in a close and personal relationship with Jesus if we are arrogant and egotistical. This is missing the whole point of what Jesus has to offer us through His Gospel and Holy Spirit. The moment we are able to acknowledge that we are a broken people, imperfect and fragile, then we are able to formulate a much clearer and honest response to His question of, “Who do you say I am?”
- Secondly, we need to accept that as limited human beings we can never have a full understanding of the mysteries of the universe, God and the miracle of life. What we can have, in abundance, is faith! Faith then becomes a central tenet of our response to His question, “Who do you say I am?”
- Thirdly, we need to accept that no one answer will be the same for everyone. We are all different. Yes, we celebrate the same idea of faith and the saga of Jesus incarnate, but our human life experiences, our initial engagement or experience with the Christ, is unique to us all. We all have our own story to tell, our own journey in the faith to share and our own path to follow in His name. Therefore, it follows that each and every one of us will have a unique and special answer to the question that Jesus asks us, “Who do you say I am?” And you know what? That is ok.
- Lastly, because we are on a journey of faith and life, we will find that as we grow in ourselves and in our faith, our response and answers to His question, “Who do you say I am?” may change over the years. As spiritual beings we are never static if we are determined to grow and develop as a Chosen People. Jesus expects us to challenge ourselves and grow through the joys and suffering of our daily lives. If we grow stagnant as a person, then our faith grows stagnant too. Life is forever changing and so are we. Therefore it follows that our response to Jesus may change, as well. And you know what? That is ok, too.

If I had to muster up the courage to try and pen an answer for you this morning in response to the question that Jesus asks me, “Who do you say I am?” I would find it very difficult, for Jesus represents so much of me that is unspoken and unknown to my conscious soul. By attempting to formulate a response, I may not do justice to the impact and depth that my relationship with Jesus has.

However, perhaps it a good challenge for me to accept, so let me try and formulate an answer to the question that Jesus poses to us through the Gospel. Perhaps, later today, you too can sit down and try to formulate your answer to the eternal question that is asked of us, “Who do you say I am?”

For me, at this moment of time, my answer would go something like this...

“Lord, you are the reason I find meaning in my life, what I do, what I believe in, you are the structure of my day and night. You are the grace by which I live, in spite of my many failings and brokenness; I abide in your spirit, knowing that my soul can rest easy in your presence. I can live because you live in me.”

This is by no means an exhaustive response or answer but it is an honest and personal

response from me to Jesus, today. Perhaps tomorrow or next year, my response may be different. Time will tell.

My challenge to you this morning is to mull over the powerful question that Jesus leaves all of us with. Take your time. Start to think about how He has changed your life, given you strength, shown you grace, helped you to walk your daily path. Then, when you have the time, sit down and write down how you feel you would answer this question if you met Jesus in the street tomorrow and He asked you the question, "Who do you say I am?" Perhaps Simon Peter really summed it up well with his answer, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

I wish you peace and a restful Sunday.

Every blessing to you and your loved ones.

Fr Darron.