

Twenty-fourth Week in Ordinary Time – 09-12-2021

In today's gospel Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they respond, John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets.

There were about as many answers to this question as there were people – even among Jesus' disciples. Perhaps not a lot has changed.

There are at least 200 denominational churches that can be readily identified in the world today and it is probably safe to say that each one has its own teaching on who they say Jesus is.

Then there are over 2,000 non-denominational mega-churches in the U.S. alone and thousands of so-called smaller bible churches scattered throughout the country.

Additionally, there are the so-called emerging churches or home churches that are spawning up here and there because people don't like the traditional denominational categories. Who knows what they have to say about who Jesus is.

All told there are an estimated 35,496 independent or non-denominational churches and other ecclesial communities according to the Association of Religion Data Archives.

Each potentially has its own doctrines, disciplines and ecclesiastical structure. And they all claim to be following the Bible.

It is probably safe to say that each of these communities has something slightly different to say about who Jesus is and how to follow him or they wouldn't have separated themselves from the

original source in the first place – of course the original source being the Catholic Church which is not a denomination. We are the Church that Jesus Christ founded and every other community to some degree has separated itself from us.

Anyway, Jesus expects us to follow him. And since he never asks the impossible he wouldn't expect this without showing us exactly how?

So when Jesus asked his disciples the question, "Who do people say that I am?" it certainly wasn't out of concern for his reputation.

His only concern was that his disciples knew the truth of his identity so that every generation to come would know this very same truth without any doubt so that we would follow him also.

When Jesus asked his original question he knew that it would elicit a number of different responses. So he changed the question and asked, "Who do you say that I am?"

And it was St. Peter, the first pope, who as usual stood up for the rest and said, "You are the Christ."

Then Jesus proceeded to tell his disciples exactly what that meant – that he must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days.

But a lot of people don't want to know who the real Jesus is because the real Jesus makes demands on our comfort.

Even St. Peter, Jesus' chosen apostle to head the Church, after making his powerful declaration, reproached Jesus when he heard that he would be rejected and killed.

But Jesus strongly rebuked him in return saying, get behind me Satan for you are thinking not as God does but as human beings do.

Whoever wishes to come after Jesus must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow him.

But we have freewill so we can choose to think not as God does but as human beings do. As I said before, there are around 35,496 independent or non-denominational churches and other ecclesial communities to choose from.

There are many so-called gospels being preached that are totally contrary to the true and enduring gospel consistently taught by our Lord Jesus Christ through his Holy Catholic Church.

For most of us following Jesus won't likely lead to martyrdom but it could? It probably won't mean much more than a little ridicule from time to time, most of it behind our backs, perhaps even the loss of a few friends and of course a little self-denial. But is this too much to ask?

"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake and that of the gospel will save it."

So Jesus is asking each one of us today, "Who do you say that I am?" It's a vitally important question and the answer lies most perfectly in his Holy Catholic Church.