

## **Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Do we ever wonder what our Church will be like in ten, twenty or fifty years from now? In one sense we can only speculate about what the Church will be like. But in another sense, we can play a big part in helping to determine what the future of the Church will be. The Plenary Council for the Australian Church is inviting us to have a say about what kind of a Church we will be. It is inviting us to reflect together on the question, “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?”

I think today’s gospel is calling us to reflect upon something that is at the heart of who we are as Church for today and for the future. We notice that Jesus makes his way right up to the northern tip of the land of Israel. He is in the villages on the edge of a city that had been rebuilt by Philip the Tetrarch and renamed after him and the emperor. Jesus chooses Caesarea Philippi, near one of the sources of the Jordan River, to begin his journey towards Jerusalem. But it is more than just a physical journey. As he begins this journey he asks his disciples to tell him who people say he is. It made sense that some thought of him as being John the Baptist reincarnated, others the Prophet Elijah returned to earth, and others the Prophet that God promised he would send. But all this was in the head. To talk about what others thought was not enough. Jesus needed to know how his own disciples

related to him. “Who do you say I am?” Who am I for you? What does it mean to be in relationship with me? These are really the central questions of the gospel. They are the questions that every baptised Christian needs to answer if the Church is to have a future.

Peter speaks for the others without consulting them. “You are the Christ”. Mark does not elaborate on Peter’s simple words as Matthew does. But he goes on to say that Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him. He was in danger of being misunderstood and acclaimed as a temporal leader who would lead a popular revolt against the Roman occupation of Israel. Jesus affirms that he is the Christ, the anointed one of God. But quickly makes clear to them the kind of Christ he is.

“He began to teach them that the Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again.” When Peter heard that, he was convinced that Jesus had it all wrong. How could the anointed one of God be made to undergo rejection, suffering and death? It was too early for Peter to notice that Jesus also spoke of rising from the dead. What Peter had hoped would be a private affair between himself and Jesus, Jesus made into an opportunity to teach all who would chose to follow him. Jesus goes

beyond talking about his own suffering and tells us all that the cost of being his disciple would be that we must share in his suffering. “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.” There is no room among the disciples of Jesus for people who are selfish. We can’t call ourselves disciples of Jesus unless we are ready to be like him in the way that we reach out in love to others. “The one who wants to save his life that will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake and the sake of the gospel, will save it.”

To say that we have been baptised really doesn’t mean very much does it. We have to earn the right to call ourselves Christians. Not in the sense that we go out and do great things on our own. But in the sense that we keep listening for the ways that Jesus moves us and empowers us to make his love present in our world. The question that Jesus asks, “Who do you say I am?” is such an important question for all of us. Who Jesus is for us makes a difference to the way that we can be for others. If we know that relationship of love that Jesus has for us, then we are tapped in to the love that we are called to share with others. If Jesus is the source of our hope, then we can be a beacon of hope for others. If we have learned how to put our trust in Jesus, then others can put their trust in us.

I don’t know what our Church will look like in ten or twenty or fifty years. But I can have a say about what our Church looks like now. By asking that question, “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?”, I am beginning to allow the Holy Spirit to shape me to be a part of the Church that God wants me to be. By inviting others to ask that question with me and listening to what they have to say, I am being even more open to the Holy Spirit.

What we are asking today is for you to answer that question in the company of a few other people. We would like you to gather two or three other people and follow the reflection process that is outlined in the sheet that you will find on the pews. You might choose to meet with those people over a cup of coffee at home or down the street. You might choose to gather with others in the foyer of the church at one of the times listed in the bulletin. It is expected that you will want to meet more than once over the next three or four weeks to give opportunities for everyone to have their say and for the group to reflect upon their experience of the different topics chosen. When we begin to answer the question, “What is God asking of us in Australia at this time?” we might find ourselves also answering the question that Jesus asks us today, “Who do you say I am?”