

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C

Deacon Frank Prideaux

I'm not particularly fond of bumper stickers, but I recently saw one I like: **FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST**. It must have been a wonderful thing for the disciples to gather with Jesus - watching him at prayer, learning from him what it means to place oneself in the presence of the Father. **But Jesus was always surprising people.** He wasn't always easy to follow.

In the middle of their prayer, Jesus suddenly looked up, turned to his disciples and asked them a double-barreled question: *Who do the crowds say I am? - Who do you say I am?*

Jesus **made** a distinction, **wanted** to make a distinction, between *the crowds* and *the disciples*. Crowds are more numerous. There are always more sheep than shepherds, even today. Crowds have no center, they are not led by anyone, and therefore a crowd has no single focus. This is reflected in the divergent answers they have to the question Jesus poses. Some said, "*John the Baptist*", others, "*Elijah*" or "*one of the ancient prophets come back to life.*"

In a crowd you will find misinformation, opinion, superstitious rumor, mad gossip and bizarre conjecture but little, if any, truth.

In the small group of disciples things were different. They were led by the Shepherd who was training them to become shepherds of his flock. Jesus was the center of their group; their single focus. During the three years in which they accompanied Jesus, their direct and intimate experience of him, remembered, discussed and enlivened by divine grace would eventually form the foundation of the Church's memory of him - her Scripture and her living Tradition. The Apostles have only one answer to Jesus' question: *The Christ of God*; and it is given by one man, one of their number. When the Church is asked - Peter answers!

The opinions of the crowds are many, and they are constantly changing; but **the teachings of the Church are one and remain forever.** And they are always guaranteed by Peter.

So let us be wary of the group-think, the pop creeds and passing fads of the crowds. All too evidently **the crowd arrives at its own 'truth' and can change it at will.** The Church, however, receives the truth from above - as **revelation** from God through Jesus - and must preserve and defend it, no matter the cost, down through the centuries, until the final revelation of Christ.

Jesus now goes on to make a second distinction - that between the 'pop' understanding of the word *Christ* and the true meaning of the word. This is why he cautions his disciples "not to tell anyone about this". A common misconception among the crowd was that the Christ would be a powerful political liberator who would set Israel free from the Romans. **This was far from the truth. The Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day.**

Do you see what I mean by 'revelation'? Truth from God through Jesus. This was no invention of

a particularly creative student at the Jerusalem Bible College, if such a place existed. Neither was it the outcome of a Gallup poll. This was simply the astonishing, incredible, unexpected word of truth brought to the world from heaven by the Word of God made flesh.

When Peter, in the Gospel of Matthew (16:23), attempts to 'correct' this word of Jesus: *Heaven preserve you, Lord ... this must not happen to you;* he is forcefully put in his place by the Lord who commands him: ***Get behind me, Satan! ...the way you think is not God's way but man's.***

And so we come to the third distinction Jesus makes – that between *himself* and the *disciples*. Note the progression of this Gospel passage –

- I renounce; you renounce.
- I take up my Cross; you take up yours.
- I die; you die.
- I will rise; you will rise.

Then to **all** he said, *'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, renounce yourselves and take up your cross every day and follow me. For those who want to save their lives will lose them; but those who lose their lives for my sake, will save them.'*

Following the Lord throughout the journey of our life is a wonderful thing. So many people don't know where they are going and so many don't know which direction their lives should take.

We Catholic Christians are so lucky; we follow the Lord.

I know exactly where I am going – *Wherever he takes me!*

The lesson is really quite simple: All we need do is to keep following the light of Christ - not the crowd, but the light of Jesus Christ.

Like the bumper sticker said: **FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST.**

IN THE NAME OF FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN