

Homily - Mark.8: 27-37
24th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B
12th September 2021

Who do you say I am?

It was the 19th century British essayist, Charles Lamb, who snatched the 17th century playwright William Shakespeare from his undeserved obscurity, returning him to the limelight of fame. Charles Lamb was once involved in a discussion on the question of who the greatest literary genius of all time had been. Two names finally emerged: William Shakespeare and Jesus of Nazareth. Lamb put an end to the debate when he said: “I’ll tell you the difference between these two men. If Shakespeare walked into this room right now, we would all rise to greet him, but if Christ came in, we would all fall down and worship Him.” There lies the essential difference between the Man from Nazareth and all the other great people we can ever think of. Well! Today’s Gospel describes who Jesus really is and gives us the unique conditions for Christian discipleship, namely, denying oneself, taking up one’s cross, and following Jesus.

In the Gospel, we find Jesus asking two questions to His disciples about His identity: “Who do people say I am?” and then He asks them a personal question: “Who

do you say I am?”. Now, Jesus realized that if His disciples did not know who He really was, then His entire ministry, His suffering and His death would be useless. And surprisingly enough, prompted by the Spirit of God, Peter was able to declare publicly: “You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Keith Miller was a Texas business man who underwent a conversion from being a nominal Christian to being a deeply committed Christian. He describes that experience in his book: “The Taste of New Wine”. The seed of the conversion was planted in his first year in college, when he had a serious car accident on a remote stretch of highway. He lay by the side of the road for a full hour and a half with a broken neck, waiting for an ambulance. And he writes: “I remember lying beside the Highway and praying very simply. I was very much awake. As I prayed, I had a strange feeling of peace and I thought to myself, ‘What a shame to find out so late in life that this kind of peace is a reality...’”.

That accident eventually became a great blessing for Keith. And he writes: “I realized at that moment that even in this tragedy which might be the end of my life, there was something very personal, very real, which was more important than anything else I had ever known”. Yes! He began to sense something of the

majesty of God in the world. There awoke in him a realization that he must somehow learn more about God and find out more about Jesus Christ. One day in the middle of the night he suddenly woke up and told his wife passionately: “Honey, I think I’ve got to go back to school to find out more about God, more about Jesus Christ”.

Now, what about each of us: “How do I experience Jesus in my life?”. Do I experience Him as someone very personal and very real, more real and more important than anything or anyone I have ever known? And I believe it would also be appropriate then to ask: “How does Jesus experience me? Does He experience me as someone who truly wants to follow Him?”

Alfred Tennyson one of the most popular British poets has written a lot on God and on God’s love. One day as Tennyson was taking a walk in his garden; a friend approached him and then asked him: “Tennyson, you have written a lot about God and His love. But who is God for you? Immediately, looking at a plant near him, Tennyson said like this: “what the sunlight is for this plant is what God for me”: A statement that came from a deep God - experience, a deep Christ - experience.

Dear brothers and sisters, as we continue the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, we shall pray that we too may have a deep God - experience, a true Christ - experience. Remember! There's a man hidden away in every scene of our lives. And his name is Jesus. Once we find Him, experience Him, encounter Him and meet Him up close and personal, no scene in our life will ever be the same again. It will always be special. As Saint John Chrysostom would say: "You can call happy those who saw Him... But, come to the altar and you will see Him, you will touch Him, you will give to Him holy kisses, you will wash Him with your tears, you will carry Him within you like Mary Most Holy."

Well, dear brothers and sisters, let Jesus never pass by us unnoticed. And let that question of Jesus keep ringing in our minds: "Who do you say I am?"

God bless you all! **Amen.**