

Commentary to the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel Summary



Jesus asks his disciples what the crowds were saying about him. Then he asked his disciples, "But who do you say I am?" Peter replies, "The Christ of God." Thereupon, Jesus says, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly...be killed and on the third day be raised." Then Jesus says that anyone who wishes to follow him as a disciple must also be ready to give up his life for his sake.

Life Implications

In this gospel passage, Jesus defines what the mission of the Christ (Messiah) and subsequently of Christian disciples will be. Contrary to popular expectations, Jesus the Messiah will not be the conquering hero who will fix everything that has gone wrong in the world because of human deceit and violence. Certainly Jesus recognizes human suffering, and responds to it with compassion. He provides food for the hungry, he cures the sick, he drives out demons. However, his mission as Messiah is to address the human dilemma on a deeper level. He will address the inauthentic human condition that is the source of the world's injustice and suffering. Jesus will do so as the Son of Man.

To understand what Jesus means by identifying himself as the Son of Man (the Son of Adam or the Human) we have to see it in the context of the entire biblical narrative about the reality of the human condition. In the beginning God creates humans in his image: children of God, not part of God, but like God. Sadly, we do not get a chance to see what authentic human existence looks like. What we do see is inauthentic human existence soon after the beginning. The first humans reject their truth as creatures. Their children continue to kill and to deceive each other until the human is barely recognizable as being and acting like God. "In the eyes of God the earth was corrupt and full of lawlessness" (Gn 6:11).

Born into a corrupt and lawless world, humans do not have much chance of knowing, much less of living an authentic existence as God's image. Through revelations and covenants with the Hebrew people, we first hear the good news that God does not abandon his estranged children, but will liberate them from their state of inauthentic existence. This dramatic, divine liberation came to be identified with the appearance of an enigmatic figure called Son of Man (Dan 7:13-14).

Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man. Jesus is the Human created in the divine image as the beginning of a New Genesis. In the gospel narratives we now are able to see in Jesus what authentic human existence looks like. Jesus faithfully lives in a relation of covenant love as Son with his Heavenly Father. He overcomes every temptation. He acts in complete union with the Father's love for all of the human family, estranged in exile.

The expectation of the crowds then and now is that Jesus as Messiah would do a quick-fix of the mess that we humans have made for ourselves. This expectation is similar to that of an avaricious, deceitful person who has hurt people and has also gotten himself in debt, and now hopes that the hurt and his debt will be taken care of by some messiah figure. It did not take Jesus long to realize that unless inauthentic human existence is created anew in the divine image, humans will continue to make a mess of things. The avaricious, deceitful person, unless transformed inwardly with a new heart, would soon be repeating his destructive actions.

Jesus the Son of Man fulfills his mission as Messiah by authentically living his human existence as Son of God. The Church now proclaims the good news that the Risen Son of Man and Messiah is present among us to create us anew in his own image. In that renewed image of God, we too are enabled to live an authentic human existence as God intended in the creation of the first humans. We learn what that means in the unique circumstances of our lives through the life and teaching of Jesus. By doing so, we will be able to help fix the corruption and lawlessness that fills the earth, rather than adding to it.

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