

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Feb 20th 2014

“Who do you say I am?” Jesus asks Peter.

How shall we answer that essential question that is the foundation of our faith? Perhaps more important is how that answer influences how we listen to the words of Jesus and in turn how we respond to those words.

In the first reading, James admonishes the early Christians to refrain from favoritism towards the “haves” of the day compared to the lowly and meek. The essential message to not show partiality is one of the refreshing themes of Pope Francis and is a core charism of the Society of Jesus. To be in solidarity with those seeking social justice is the action expected from the reflection on the Scripture to not show favoritism and to “love your neighbor as yourself”. However, the challenge for us is to translate the extreme example noted in James to more subtle ways we may marginalize those around us. How often can we see God in those who we may have a conflict or a disagreement with? Do we judge and show partiality based on the more insidious cues of our culture like external appearance, perceived intelligence, smooth talking or social charm and miss seeing God in our neighbor? It is relatively speaking, easier in the contrast of rich and poor as described by James (gold rings and fine clothes versus shabby clothes) but far more challenging to be in true union with those who may appear to be of a similar status to us.

We return to Peter’s answer: “You are the Messiah”. If this is our response then in all people we should seek to show no partiality in large or small ways or with grand or subtle contrasts.

The action required of our answer should be nothing less. Yet take solace in the fact that even Peter, the Rock of the Church was rebuked by our Lord because though he knew who Jesus was, he did not yet know the true nature of the Kingdom of God. So as we move forward each day, we ask for the Spirit to guide us to the action Jesus desires from our recognition of Him as Messiah.

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