

24th Sunday per Annum - B
Isaiah 50:5-9a;
James 2:14-18;
Mark 8:27-35
Little Flower - 9/15/22

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's second reading from St. James and today's Gospel offer us important insights into faith.

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks the apostles who people say that he is. In other words, what's the word on the street? They respond quickly. Some say John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, one of the prophets. He then asks them, "*But who do you say that I am?*" Peter responds for all of them, "*You are the Christ.*" In Matthew's Gospel, Peter responds, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" [16:16], to which Jesus responds, "*And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church...*" [16:18].

Faith is a lifelong journey. Therefore, it is important to understand that there are four stages in the development of faith. The faith of small children can be called familial faith. Little children believe what their parents believe or, at least, what they understand their parents to believe. The second stage of faith we might call affiliative faith. As children get older and spend more time away from their family, they adopt the faith of the community or communities of which they are part. For example, when I attended Little Flower school, my classmates and I believed exactly what the sisters told us to believe.

Beginning in late grade school, children begin to question their faith. The third stage of faith is called searching faith, and it can go on for many years and take many forms. For some people, it may include questioning everything, including the existence of God. For others, it may only include questioning the beliefs and morals of the church they attend. For others, it may simply be embracing as their own their childhood faith. Ideally people arrive at a personal or owned faith. In other words, when Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am? Don't tell me who others have told you I am. Rather, who am I to you? What do I mean to you?" they are able to answer with Peter, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" This is what Jesus was asking from his disciples and what he now asks from us today.

When Jesus prophesies his passion, Peter rebukes him, and Jesus tells Peter that he is not thinking as God thinks but as human beings think. Although Peter professed personal faith in Jesus, this did not keep him from completely misunderstanding the mission of Jesus. The same can be true of us. We may have personal faith in Jesus but not understand Jesus or his message. In other words, our understanding of the teachings of Jesus and the Church can be very wrong at times. Today I think we see this often in those who are particularly critical of Pope Francis. Although Pope Francis may be wrong about some things just as Peter was, he is the Pope, and, therefore, his teachings are more likely to be correct than those who criticize him on social media.

In the final part of the Gospel, Jesus reminds us that "*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.*" True personal faith in Jesus requires us to imitate Christ in our lives, and imitating Christ in our lives always includes the cross.

The Letter of St. James answers one of the key questions about faith. If someone says he has faith but does not have works, can that faith save him? This question has been debated since the Reformation. Based on the teachings of St. Paul, many, if not most, non-Catholic Christians believe that we are saved by faith alone. The Catholic Church has always taught that both faith and good works are necessary for salvation. St. James ends this passage in a clever way. He wrote, "*Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.*" In other words, St. James implies that we cannot demonstrate our faith without good works.

My brothers and sisters, today is Catechetical Sunday. Besides faith and good works, we are all called to be missionary disciples.