

REFLECTION FOR THE TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Today's readings pose this question: 'Who is Jesus Christ? Who do people say that Jesus Christ is?' This is the question that Jesus asks his disciples in today's Gospel. 'Who do people say I am?' And the disciples give various answers: 'Some say you are John the Baptist; others say you are Elijah; and others say you are one of the ancient prophets who has risen.' These are answers that see Jesus Christ as someone who is not Him, typical of people who do not really know who Jesus Christ is. Then Jesus asks his disciples, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter speaks up and says, 'You are the Messiah of God.' Peter certainly did not know very well what that meant, but he had recognised in Christ the Saviour awaited by the people of Israel, the Messiah announced by the prophets and long awaited.

However, Jesus forbids the Apostles from saying that He was the Messiah, because He did not want people to follow Him expecting great thing which is an affirmation of strength and power. Therefore, in addition to this prohibition, Jesus tells his disciples that He, the Son of Man, would suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, be killed and rise again on the third day. Furthermore, anyone who wanted to follow Him would have to renounce themselves and their personal ambitions, take up their cross every day and follow Him. For, Jesus said, 'Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake will save it.'

The truth is that the prophets had already spoken of a Messiah who would save his people through suffering. Examples of this are the songs of the Servant of the Lord by the prophet Isaiah and the first reading we heard today from the prophet Zechariah. In this reading, there is mention of a pierced figure, whom the people will look upon and mourn as one mourns a son, but it will be a death that will wash away the sin and impurity of the people. The fourth evangelist sees in this passage a reference to Jesus Christ, pierced on the cross, whose death washed us clean of our sins.

Today Jesus continues to ask us: 'Who am I for you?' What answer will we give him? Who is Jesus for me? What do I expect from Jesus? Am I capable of discovering him by carrying the cross every day, in the midst of suffering and pain? Or am I also looking for a miracle-working Jesus who will solve my problems, a Jesus without a cross? The world has always had difficulty accepting a Saviour who saves us through the way of the cross. Look at how difficult it is for us to believe in God in the face of death, suffering, violence and war. How often do we ask ourselves: where is God who let my child die? Where is God who allows millions of children to suffer from war, violence, hunger and disease? Where is God in the midst of my pain?

The answer is not easy to accept, but it is the answer of Jesus who tells us: God is suffering with you, dying with you, going hungry and cold with the hungry and helpless, calling on each one of us to take up our cross and our share in building his Kingdom of peace and justice, standing alongside those who suffer, the helpless, the refugees, the persecuted and abandoned brothers and sisters, knowing that whatever we do to a brother or sister, we do to Jesus.

And it is clothed in Christ that we are invited to live our lives, as St. Paul tells us in the second reading. Through baptism, we have all been clothed in Christ. Therefore, 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; we are all one in Christ Jesus.' Baptised in Christ, we are all one with Christ. So there is no longer any reason for distinctions of race, people, language, nation, sex or social status. Before God, we are all children, all brothers and sisters in Christ, all members of the one and only family of God.

Let us join hands, tear down the walls that separate us, silence our weapons, and build peace. May God's love reign in our hearts and make each one of us a herald of his Good News of forgiveness and peace. Christ walks with us; he carries the cross with us; he suffers, cries and laughs with us; let us not be afraid, let us proclaim to the world the victory of LOVE.

AMEN