

## Homily for the 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

The word ‘identity’ is defined as “the fact of being who or what a person or thing is”. So, given that definition, there are lots of ways we each could identify ourselves. I am a man; a priest; a sinner; someone who loves to eat. We could define ourselves as introverts or extroverts; as funny or serious; as Americans; as Catholics or other Christians; as a mother or a father, as a son or as a daughter. Certainly in today’s Gospel, when Jesus asked His disciples what other people were saying about His identity He got quite a few answers: John the Baptist; Elijah; Jeremiah; one of the other prophets; Christ, the Son of the living God. And with the last answer here – the Messiah – Peter gets the gold star!

But, why was Jesus asking? I mean, did He not know His identity – did He not know who He was? Although, just imagine for a moment Jesus growing up as a child and trying to come to terms with who He was! Was He a miracle-worker? Was He a rabbi? Was He a revolutionary? Was He merely a carpenter, the son of Joseph and Mary? Was He just different? How could Jesus know?

Well, it’s interesting and important to note that when Jesus steps into the light of public ministry for the very first time, in His baptism at the Jordan, the voice of God the Father says, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” And in some of the last words of His public ministry, Jesus says from the cross, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” How did Jesus know His identity, who He was? He looked to God His Father. It’s by being in relationship with the Father that the Son knew who He was.

And Jesus would need to remain rooted in the truth of this most fundamental identity, as the only-begotten Son of God. He needed to be reminded of that truth when He was in the desert being tempted by Satan, who said, “*If* you are the Son of God, throw yourself down” from the parapet of the temple. He needed to be reminded of this truth at His crucifixion when people passing by sneered at Him saying, “Save yourself, *if* you are the Son of God, [and] come down from the cross!” Satan, the world, other people – they all tried to get Jesus to doubt His identity, to doubt the truth of who God the Father said He was.

So, what about us – how do we define ourselves? By our work, or what we do for a living? By our social status? By our success in the classroom or on the sport’s field? By the size of our house or our income? By the number of activities our kids are involved in? By the sins of our past? By what other people say about us? These are some of the popular offerings that the world, the flesh, and the devil propose to us of what our identity should be based on.

Many times, though, how we see ourselves is shaped by our early experiences in life – by our parents, our family, our friends, and the like. Maybe people said things to you as a child that made you doubt your worth, and now you look for your identity outside yourself to make up for what others said was lacking. Or, maybe you feel like you are what you do – and, if you’ve done lots of things wrong in life, then that’s just who you are – you’ll never change. Or, maybe you felt like you were lacking material security growing up, and so now you just cling to stuff to make you feel assured and secure.

The problem with all these ways of defining ourselves – and the majority of ways we are tempted to find our identity in – is that they are all at the whim of circumstance. We can lose a job. We can fall into that sin again. We can get a bad grade on a test or do poorly on the field. Others can talk meanly behind our backs. And then, where does that leave us? Now, who are we?

Rather, to counter the pressures, the fluctuations, even the tragedies of life, we need to do what Jesus did. We need to regularly and frequently root ourselves in the truth of our most fundamental identity – as beloved sons and daughters of God the Father, in Christ. Let me tell you from personal experience, if you don't let God remind you of who you are, then the world, the flesh, and the devil will come along and propose lies for you to believe.

So, how can you do this? Well, you can start by looking in the mirror daily – into your eyes – and telling yourself that I am a beloved son or daughter of God. As a member of Christ's Body through Baptism, this is our most fundamental identity – whether you feel like it's true or not; feelings are not facts! Also, this weekend, you'll find in the bulletin a list of verses from the Scriptures about our identity in Christ – who we are in Him. You can read through that regularly during your prayer time each day.

In the end, each of us will believe what we tell ourselves over and over again. We can either agree with what God says about us, or we will believe lies. The first will bring us joy and peace, the latter will make us miserable. God bless you.