

**August 27, 2017 Who Is Jesus Homily:** Brothers and sisters, from time to time, two popular American news magazines, *Time* and *Newsweek*, featured the person of Jesus of Nazareth as the subject of their cover story. That is not without significance. Even in our secular age, the towering figure of Christ simply cannot be ignored. In 1988, the international review magazine *Time* put the face of Jesus on its cover for the sixteenth time.

Not unexpectedly, Jesus is of some interest to readers of these magazines around the feasts of Christmas and Easter. The writers of the various articles are, for the most part, skeptics, doubters and unbelievers. Here is a sampling of some of the captions that have turned up on the cover page for the last twenty years: "How did Jesus become Christ?", "Jesus goes to Washington", "Rethinking the Resurrection", "The search for Jesus", "Jesus on-line", "Why did Jesus have to die?", "Jesus at 2000", "The Jesus revolution", and "Who is Jesus?".

It is clear that the writers are divided about Jesus. There is no real consensus about his deepest identity. Polling data confirms that Jesus continues to baffle the masses, especially the influential elites represented by the media and the entertainment industry. Who is Jesus, really? A model teacher? A prophet? A pacifist? A rebel? An imposter making claims that have no justification?

All the cover stories and reports omit one important fact. Jesus declared himself to be the Son of the Living God. And that bold declaration of his divinity sealed his fate. Recall the question addressed to Jesus by the high priest, Caiaphas on the night of his trial. "Tell us", implored Caiaphas, "if you are the Christ, the son of the living God!" And Jesus replied, "I am" (Mk.14:61). His words brought immediate condemnation.

In today's gospel, Jesus challenges his disciples and insists that they each offer a response to a most direct question: "Who do you say that I am?" They must first separate themselves for the faceless crowds. The first of the disciples, Peter, speaks on his own behalf. His response amounts to a solemn profession of faith. "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God". His words receive praise from his master. "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah because it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven." (Mt.16:17) And he was not alone in his extraordinary testimony. Let us recall the astonishing words of faith uttered by a centurion (by tradition, Longinus) after the death of Jesus on the cross. "Truly this was the Son of God." (Mt.27:54)

A noted biblical scholar, and Cistercian monk, writes, "Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, the only visible person in this world or in eternity for whom it is impossible to account without immediate reference to God". The pointed question of Jesus is addressed to each one of us. "Who do you say that I am?" Who do I say that Jesus is? Who do I proclaim him to be with my words and my life? Let us recall the heroic example of Coptic Christians in Egypt who embraced a martyr's death rather than denying the fundamental truth of Jesus that is found in the Creed, that is, that He is "God from God, light from light, true God from true God".

Opinion polls are no barometer of the truth. Majority opinion is often based on ignorance and in the case of Jesus' true identity, a weak faith or unbelief. Once popular articles about our Divine Lord are soon forgotten. Christ stands tall... always!

Amen!