



What does Jesus' question "Who do men say that I am?" stir in you?

As I write, the soul-stirring questions from last Sunday's Gospel echo through this week of the Supreme Court's rulings on marriage. "Who do men say that I am?" Jesus asks the Apostles. His question teaches us to be aware of whom our contemporaries take Him to be. They will not answer "John the Baptist," "Elijah," or "one of the prophets" in 2013. For today "men say" that Jesus is a man who is by no means to be taken as seriously as His questions about Himself in the Gospel suggest. Jesus, "men say" today, is someone to go beyond, not someone who goes way beyond us. His teachings, appealing though some of them be, are far too time-bound to put in practice in a technological age—especially His tracing of marriage and family to God's original purpose for the human race "in the beginning." Whatever that may have been then, "men say" today, we have gone far beyond it in our ever-expanding capacity to design a better world for ourselves. We are free to re-invent marriage as we will; we need no longer subject ourselves to any divine plan or purpose.

But, as the Apostles learned and so do we, Jesus is not content to receive our noncommittal report of who "men say" He is. He wants to know something deeper: "Who do *you* say that I am?" Put another way, in terms that I speak to myself, this translates into, "Who do *I* say Jesus is?" And this question will not go

away. It is as fresh and challenging today as when our Savior first spoke it into history 2000 years ago.

St. Peter answered Jesus that day from within the unthreatening circle of the Apostles: "You are the Christ of God." He spoke more truly than he knew. Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection would draw Peter into the unforeseen depths of his simple confession of faith, and the Pentecost Spirit would fire him to proclaim it fearlessly in the public streets of Jerusalem: "We are witnesses of this man, who will judge the living and the dead. We must obey God rather than men. We cannot not speak of what we have seen and heard."

Jesus' simple questions stirred Peter's soul to its depths. He could not avoid answering them, and the answering transformed him. "Who do *men* say that Jesus is?" led to "Who do *I* say that Jesus is?" And lurking unexpectedly within that question lay another which the Gospels do not record but which Peter's martyrdom answered unequivocally: "Who do I say that *I* am?" To answer the question of who Jesus was, Peter had to decide who Peter was. Deciding who Jesus is led Peter to discover himself. Our times are not St. Peter's, but Jesus' questions invite us to the same transcending self-discovery that Peter came to.

On the Fourth of July we celebrate our uniquely American inheritance of freedom to pursue happiness as the laws of our Creator have designed it for us. But this week's Supreme Court decisions on marriage forcefully remind us, as Pericles reminded the ancient Greeks, that "happiness depends on being

free, and freedom depends upon being courageous.” Our society proposes to re-define marriage, to subjugate conscience, to manufacture human life and dispose of it at will. This is the context in which Jesus’ questions come to us anew: “Who do you say that I am? Who do you say that you are?”

We must pray for the courage to answer him honestly. We must not be ashamed of the Gospel.