

**Prayer Adventure**     Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time/A     August 24, 2014  
9:00 AM    Is 22:15, 19-23; Rom 11:33-36; **Mt 16:13-20** (Do we have the openness to listen to the voice of God? This touches on the very idea of prayer, lifting our hearts and minds to God.)

**“But who do you say that I am?”**

I think it is very easy for us to misunderstand the meaning of this dialogue, especially if we put it into the context of perhaps catechism class where the teacher is looking for the right answer. **Jesus was not looking for a right answer.** So this is not a matter of theology. **What he is really doing is asking for a commitment.** It’s a particular **challenge** to Peter, to the apostles, and **to every believer today.** “Who do you say that I am?”

In this case it is Peter, as usual, who takes the plunge. Just as he was the one willing to get out of the boat and move toward Jesus when Jesus came to them, so now he is the one willing to open his mouth before he has even thought about what he is going to say. But surprise! In this case he does not make a fool of himself, because in this case he is open to the heavenly Father. So Jesus says to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Peter, for you did not figure this out yourself. **You received this from my heavenly Father.**” And what is it Peter said? **“You are the Son of the living God.”**

I believe that **Jesus desires all of his followers to take the plunge and express their faith,** not necessarily using Peter’s words. That’s not the point. Rather the point is to **decide: Who really is Jesus?** We know very well that Jesus Christ is an extraordinarily popular figure throughout history, well respected. The problem is he didn’t come to become popular or to earn anyone’s respect. That’s not what he wanted. So it’s all superfluous. **He came as a gift from the Father to mirror back to us the beauty and the godliness of the nature that we share with him.** This very nature that is capable of all kinds of horrors, despicable acts, malice, ill will, and all kinds of villainy and evil is also godly, truly godly, and is revealed to us, mirrored to us, in Jesus himself. That is who we are called to be. And Jesus came to show us that, and to elicit from us the kind of trust and the kind of hope and love that will make that real, because **it is a matter of growing into this great possibility that God has fashioned.**

**We are all made in the image and likeness of God,** and that has been the proclamation of the word of God from the beginning. But for any of this to really touch us, **for any of this to really change us,** for any of this to really make an impact, we have to do something. We have to respond. **We have to decide what we really believe.** We have to commit ourselves to something. Jesus is not looking for fans, nor is Jesus looking for well-wishers. **What he wants is fellow workers, people of conviction and people of compassion who can share his mission.**

And this all begins by understanding who he is, where he comes from. If we do not **believe in his heavenly Father** and we do not **believe in the Holy Spirit he sends,** then whatever we think about him is pretty useless. And that goes for a lot of people in the world. Even though they may say nice things about Jesus Christ, it doesn’t matter because they

don't know the Father and they don't know the Spirit, and so they don't **really know who Jesus is**. So the popularity of Jesus Christ, momentary eclipsed some years ago by the Beatles, is of no lasting value anyway and never was. Nor is it worthwhile for us have some vague respect for him or for what he taught or for what he did. **He is looking for commitment.**

**Do we have the openness** expressed by St. Peter to listen to the voice of God—to **listen to the voice God?** This touches on the very idea of **prayer, lifting our hearts and minds to God**. The problem is very often when we pray we have our agenda. It's all about what we want, what we think we need. But what God has to tell us is much more important than what we have to tell God. **We have to be quiet enough to listen and hear.** In this particular case, in this story, Peter was in a right place where he could hear and blurt out what he heard. We can be like Peter as well. And we will sense God's support. **We will feel or sense ways our lives can be different: more God-centered, more fruitful, more peaceful.** Some of the ways we hear will be surprising and new. Other things we hear we will have known all along in some way. The point is **we need to respond to this, to act upon it.** By responding we are committing ourselves to the belief that Jesus is more than just a fine fellow or just a good person. By responding **we acknowledge that Jesus is a gift from God meant to send us in a new direction, equipped with new power, and ready for an adventure as God's partners in the world.**