

**Don't Have the Categories**      Twenty-fifth Week in Ordinary Time      Friday,  
September 25, 2015 8:15 AM Hg 2:1-9; **Lk 9:18-22** (Sts. Cosmas and Damian)  
(We only learn what God is doing by letting God teach us.)

**“Who do the crowds say that I am?”**

We have to imagine that Jesus himself went through all kinds of moments of soul-searching. Here he is indicating a sense of **impending doom for himself**; that's the meaning of the words. He is sensing that he is going to be handed over, but he also senses hope that this will be all for the glory God, **that God will do something to bring about something utterly wonderful in this period of apparent darkness.**

Now how to fit this into the categories that the disciples had available to them? Well, there wasn't a way. Actually the **Jewish tradition did not contain the categories that would convey what he is talking about**, so he had to make up a new language. The idea that Christianity grows out of Judaism is somewhat of a misnomer. It is true Jesus and the early disciples were for the most part Jewish, but **what he is doing is not prepared for by Jewish tradition.** It doesn't grow out of it organically. **It's something radically different from expectations.**

Now it is not necessarily unique. There were various other elements at work churning around outside of the canon, so to speak, the boundary, of Jewish tradition, with a Jewish accent of course, literature we call apocalyptic, for example, messianic, and so on. But what Jesus really came to understand was something new and different and unprepared for in the categories of Judaism.

So he asks the disciples, well, what do the people think? He wants to know what their categories are. **How are they trying to place him?** And they are rather preposterous answers, just like with the Pew research surveys people, and they say so many preposterous things. **We have to understand that people are like sheep without a shepherd; they don't know where to go or how to think.** If they did, they wouldn't need salvation. Why people think it's important to constantly ask them what they think, I do not know. All that is

necessary is to realize that they don't know, which is what this establishes once and for all. They say, oh, you are John the Baptist or one of the ancient prophets come back or whatever.

Then he says, "Well, what do you think?" Well, **Peter says, "You are the Christ."** Now we think that's a good answer, but actually it wasn't. Why? **We have already changed the meaning of the word "Christ" or "Messiah" to fit Jesus**, so much so we call him Jesus Christ. But that isn't what it meant originally. **It meant another David.** Well, Jesus is not another David. So he says don't say that—that's exactly what this says. **"He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone" because it's deceptive. No one would ever understand it correctly.** Theoretically the word "anointed" could be a very generic word, but that isn't the way they used it. So we say Jesus is anointed by God and we are anointed by God. We are anointed in Baptism. We are anointed in Confirmation, and so on. And that's all very well and good. We are Christ-ed you could say. Some people call Baptism Christening. That's fine, nothing wrong with that as long as you understand it in light of what Jesus really was. But that isn't what Peter was doing. **Peter was giving him an assignment that was very different**, that was in fact triumphal, regal, royal, even imperial. And that's what he rebuked him for and that's why he forbade them to use this term, that we use all the time. Well, things change; **meanings change.**

However, we have a very similar problem today. The modern world and the ancient world, both, have one thing in common: they **don't have the categories that reflect what God is doing**, because **we only learn what God is doing by letting God teach us.** It isn't like God comes in and fits into what we think God should be doing. That doesn't work that way. God is the one with the initiative, and **we have to learn always from scratch what does God want now.** There is a flow, and there is a coherence to what God does in all ages, through the ages, but not necessarily one that fits what we might think or what people think about life for the world or anything else. So we have to be very cautious. We can ask what do people think and what do people say, but let's not take any of it very seriously.