

**Calm and Persistent Prayer**    Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time/A    August 27, 2017  
10:00 AM    Is 22:19-23;    **Rom 11:33-36;    Mt 16:13-20**    (We are living in equally  
perilous times, and we also need the peace and wonder that will lead us through.)

**“Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.”**

Now this may strike you as rather odd that Jesus would be so quick to shush up his disciples after this, as it were, revelation about his identity; but there’s very good reason for this. It has to do with the problems of words themselves. **Whenever someone asks a question about what is this, we always answer in terms of something else we know.** For example what’s a radio? Well a radio is like a telegraph except you can hear voices. Well what’s a television? Well a television is like a radio, but it has pictures. What’s a computer? Well a computer is like a television with a typewriter and a secretary.

But what comes as an explanation for a question about something truly new that’s not like anything else? **What about something really unique that cannot be compared to anything else? That’s Christ.** We take the word “Christ” and we apply it to him and we have done that for two thousand years and we are comfortable with it, but actually it doesn’t say much. In fact you are all christ because it simply means “anointed”; you are all anointed so you are all christ. But the actual identity of Jesus, **the answer to his question, “Who do you say that I am?” can only be known through the experience of his own death and resurrection.** He is the new wine that cannot be poured into the old wineskins of various titles and models and names. He is new.

**But Jesus praises Peter because he comes up with a new word. It’s not the Christ; it’s “Son of the living God.”** That had never been said before in Judaism. It’s not in the Old Testament. It’s a totally new expression. And **Jesus said, “Peter, you’ve been listening to God, not just everybody else, so blessed are you.”** And he is talking about the wonders of prayer. **Prayer can lead us to newness of thought and vision and life.**

**St. Paul** in the second reading is in a very similar place. He is actually at the moment, as he writes, **overwhelmed with the riches, the wisdom, and the knowledge that God has shared with him through prayer.** He didn’t get it through reading books. He got it through being quiet

with the Lord. Like Peter, Paul knew that only by opening himself to God's presence in humble prayer and contemplation could he actually find the peace and wonder that could sustain his life amid the perilous times he was living in. But **we are living in equally perilous times, and we also need the peace and wonder that will lead us through. And we are only going to get it through prayer and contemplation.**

What is common to both **Peter and Paul** is that they persisted in prayer and suffering and the work at hand. They didn't give up when their earlier efforts did not yield some fruit. And don't think that they received wonderful benefits immediately. Their lives are a product of **constant effort in the fields of prayer, suffering, and work.** They didn't demand signs as did the crowds. They didn't demand results. That's a snare that has trapped many a perspective disciple. Rather, they patiently followed the guidance of grace. Through prayer they received, not a complete explanation of what the coming kingdom would be like or when it would arrive or how or in what way God would form this new world. But they received a strong enough hint, a strong enough intimation to draw them on **a sustained commitment to the mission that God gave them.**

We must be assured that God gives mission to all the baptized. To be baptized is to be baptized into Christ and to share in his mission in some way. Finding out how is of course one of our tasks. **Calm and persistent prayer will yield the support and the insight we need to live our lives in communion with and in the love of God.** Ultimately through prayer we learn not only the answer to the question of who is Jesus, but we actually learn "who am I" from God's point of view.