

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Peaceful Messiah on a Donkey**     Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time/B     September 16, 2018     **Is 50:4c-9a;**     Jas 2:14-18;     **Mk 8:27-35**     St. Peter and Paul Church, Oberammergau, Germany     (The only way to peace is by being peaceful.)

So I was just thinking that probably several of my ancestors were baptized in this church, and doubtless they came to Mass here, received their sacraments, and so on; so it's kind of an interesting moment—beautiful church.

Now considering the gospel today, there is a problem with words and what they mean. And **when Jesus asked the apostles who people say that I am, he was actually goading them in a way to think—to listen and to think.** Now the answers that came back all presupposed reincarnation—interestingly enough—because John the Baptist was dead, Elijah was dead, and the prophets were all dead, and yet they were saying, well, maybe he is one of them returned, reincarnated. That's interesting in itself.

Well, he just bypasses, Jesus just bypasses those sorts of answers and says, “But **what do you think?** What do you say?” And **Peter says, “You are the Christ.” That means you are the Messiah.** And Jesus' reaction was to say don't say a word about that. The reason is very simple. The word “Messiah” **at that time meant a triumphal king, someone like David.** He was triumphal. David was very able and powerful and he gathered all the tribes into one single federation. He is the one who united Israel and all the tribes of Israel which we call Jews, but they weren't; only one tribe were Jews. There were many tribes, twelve at least. Anyway twelve is the number used. There were many. So that was **the ideal, that somehow God's grace would work once again the way it did in the time of David and that Israel would once again become a prominent country:** independent, prosperous, and so on. That's what the Messiah meant.

And Jesus didn't want to have anything to do with that. **He rejected that kind of messianism. What he accepted was** what you heard in the first reading, **the Suffering Servant**

**from Isaiah**, because he had already realized that **the only way to peace is by being peaceful**. And the only way to be truly peaceful is **to surrender one's demands, one's inner desire for self-preservation**. That has to be surrendered to some higher power or there will be no peace. So **he refashioned the idea of Messiah**, because he did accept eventually that whole story of Palm Sunday riding into Jerusalem on a foal of a donkey. That is itself an acceptance of messianic role, **but not the triumphal one**. There were two images of Messiah in Israel: **one on a donkey, peaceful**; one on a horse, victorious. Jesus chose the donkey. That's the significance of the episode that we are hearing about in today's gospel.