

HOMILY
September 17, 2006

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

Ladies, can you remember where you were when your husband first proposed to you? Men, where were you when you first found out that you and your wife were going to be parents? Can you recall where you were when you got the best news of your life? Or the worst? What were you doing on the day Dr. King was assassinated, or Elvis died, or the Challenger Shuttle blew up? The most ordinary surroundings can seem suddenly memorable at a time like that. They get seared into our memory so that twenty years later we hear ourselves saying to our children, "I remember exactly what I was doing the day I heard...."

I wonder if Jesus' Disciples said that to each other whenever they passed through the village of Caesarea Philippi. I wonder if, for the rest of their lives, that particular town was seared into their memories. You see, it was at Caesarea Philippi that Jesus asked the Disciples that most critical of all questions: "*Who do you say that I am?*"

This is the central question of the Gospels, the central question of human history. This is the dividing line that separates authentic faith from passing enchantment. Christ asked his Disciples, as he asks us today, "Who do you say that I am?"

Throughout the ages, various individuals have attempted to answer that question posed by Jesus. Ernest Renan, a French writer, answered it by saying Jesus was a sentimental idealist. An American businessman by the name of Bruce Barton said that Jesus was the greatest salesman who ever lived. A Jewish writer by the name of William Hirsch responded by saying the Jesus conformed to the clinical picture of paranoia. A musical drama was performed some years ago that answered that question by saying that Jesus was a superstar.

The gospel writers also attempted in their own fashion to answer this question. They bestowed upon him numerous titles and claims: Son of God, Son of Man, Divine Physician, King, Prophet, Bridegroom, Light of the world, The Door, The Vine, High Priest, The Bright and Morning Star, The Alpha and the Omega. All of these were attempts to answer this question posed by Jesus. But these are attempts made by others. Jesus is more concerned with what your answer is than what their answer is!

So who do you say that Jesus is? I'm not asking what you've heard others say about him, but who do you say he is? How would you respond to Jesus? Most Catholics could respond as quickly as Peter, with such answers as:

Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity.

Jesus is the Savior of the World.

While these answers are all true, do we really understand what we are saying? How well do we know the savior in whom we profess our faith? Are we ready to live the challenging life of the Disciples? Faith is so much like love—don't just tell me you love me, show me!

But if words don't capture the meaning, what do our actions say? For three weeks in a row our brother James calls us to match what's in our hearts with our works. If we say we believe, faith will lead to action whether it be letting go of prejudice or caring for the corporal or spiritual needs of our brothers or sisters or living righteously as people of peace. The best way to live our faith in Jesus is through our actions.

If Jesus is the most compassionate person who ever lived, do we respond to those around us with compassion and empathy? If he championed the cause of life, how well do we show respect for the dignity of human life? Do we, like him, embrace the gift of every moment of life and strive to live it to the full?

Likewise, as we celebrate Catechetical Sunday, we recognize those who serve as catechists among us. Catechists are people who take Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" seriously. As they work to live as disciples, they also teach others how to be his disciples. Catechists play an important role in discovering the gift of faith with the world. Lesson by lesson, in word and example, they help us come to know Jesus so as we grow up, we can be just like him.

Look backward, see Christ dying for you.

Look upward, see Christ pleading for you.

Look inward, see Christ living in you.

Look forward, see Christ coming for you.