

## 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

### GOSPEL

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Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' And they told him. 'John the Baptist,' they said 'others Elijah; others again, one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he asked 'who do you say I am?' Peter spoke up and said to him, 'You are the Christ.' And he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him.

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, 'Get behind me, Satan! Because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

He called the people and his disciples to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.'

(Mark 8:27-35)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Caesarea Philippi is a Gentile, northern-frontier town in upper Galilee, on the slopes of Mount Hermon. It is one of the sources of the River Jordan. The site was known in antiquity as a shrine to the Greek and Roman nature gods. When Herod the Great's son Philip became tetrarch of the region, he rebuilt the city and named it after himself and the Emperor.
- *Satan* is the English translation of a Hebrew word whose literal meaning is 'adversary'. The idea of Satan as a figure of evil developed late in Jewish history, after the exile in Babylon. Satan and his cohort came to represent the power of evil in the universe that stood in opposition to the power of God and the coming of God's reign. In this text, it is Peter who is in opposition to God's plan because he fails to understand and accept the cross.
- By this point in Jesus' public ministry, John the Baptist had been killed by Herod Antipas (the ruler of the region of Galilee, and the son of Herod the Great and brother of Philip) because John criticised Herod's actions in marrying his brother's wife.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

Mark's Gospel contains many instructions on what it means to be a disciple. Ironically, it is often the twelve who fail the test of discipleship, while many of the minor characters in Mark provide wonderful models of true understanding. In this text, we have one example of Peter's imperfect understanding of the mission and ministry of Jesus. The question as to who Jesus is leads to one of the great acclamations of faith in the gospels: 'You are the Christ.' Peter knows that Jesus is the Messiah, the one who is to come. What he fails to understand is the type of messiah that Jesus is. Peter refuses to accept that Jesus will suffer rejection and be put to death. He cannot comprehend such an end! Peter may well have wanted the Davidic messiah who would liberate Israel from Roman occupation. He is thinking in the ways of man, not in the ways of God. He is an obstacle in the path that Jesus knows he must follow. His will be a messiahship of service, of suffering and of self-giving love. There is no triumph apart from the cross. To be a disciple is to walk this same path of service, suffering and self-giving love.

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'Who do people say I am?' How would you answer this question of Jesus?
- What cross are you being called to take up at this point? What do you need to leave behind?
- What 'crosses' have you had to bear in your life? Where did you find the strength to carry your burden? Who are the people who have helped you to bear your load? What positive consequences came from the suffering you bore? Share your reflections together.
- Use the cross as a focus for your prayer and reflection this week. Ponder deeply the question, 'Why did Jesus die?' Contemplate how this cross can be the source of eternal life for you.
- Use this verse of today's psalm as your prayer this week:

*How gracious is the Lord, and just;  
Our God has compassion.  
The Lord protects the simple hearts;  
I was helpless so he saved me.*

