

SEPTEMBER 13: O.T. XXIV: IS 50: 5-9; JAMES 2: 14-18; MARK 8: 27-35

This Sunday we begin a series of seven Sunday Gospel readings from Mark's account of the journey of Jesus and his disciples from northern Galilee to Jerusalem. Along the way Jesus gave instructions about his identity and what it meant to follow him (discipleship). Today's gospel consists of two sections, the messianic confession of Peter and Jesus' prediction of his Passion and death, followed by his clear teaching on discipleship.

Jesus asked two questions about his identity. The incident occurred at Caesarea Philippi, twenty-five miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee. This city was founded by King Philip, the son of Herod the Great, to perpetuate his memory and to honor the Roman emperor Caesar. Jesus realized that if his disciples did not know who he really was, then his entire ministry, suffering and death would be useless. Hence he decided to ask a question in two parts.

The first question: "What is the public opinion?" Their answer was, "*Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*"

The second question: "What is your personal opinion? For the first time in their relationship Peter, speaking for the other disciples, declared publicly: "*You are the Christ (Messiah) the Son of the living God.*" Peter was the first apostle to recognize Jesus publicly as the *Anointed One* (also translated *Messiah* or *Christ*). *Christ* is the Greek word for the Hebrew word *Messiah*. To say that Jesus was the Christ, the anointed one of God was to say that He was the Immanuel, the Salvation of God -- God who became Man to save sinners! It is evident that Jesus was well pleased with Peter's answer. Jesus first pronounced a blessing upon Peter, the only disciple in the Gospels to receive a personal blessing. "*Blessed are you, Simon son of John!*" Next, Jesus confirmed Peter's insight as a special revelation from God. "*No mere man has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.*" However, Jesus was quick to explain to the disciples that he was the Messiah who would redeem mankind by his suffering, death and resurrection.

The Gospel of today challenges me with a few questions: "How do I really see Jesus? Is Jesus a living experience for me, walking with me, loving me,

forgiving me, helping me and transforming my life and outlook? What difference does Jesus make in my life? Have I really given my life to him? Are there areas where I have excluded Him? Who do we say that Jesus is in our daily life? Who do we say that He is when we are in the presence of those who don't know him, those who aren't interested in him? Is the joy, the love, the peace that we find in Jesus reflected in the way we live our lives? We are gathered here today in the name of Jesus. We have not come together to celebrate a long past memorial for a merely good man who died long ago. We are here to celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ, the Messiah, our Lord and personal Savior in this Eucharistic celebration.