

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 12 September 2021

Scriptures: Isaiah 50:4-9; James 2:14-18; Mark 8:27-35

Homily: Fr. Ken

In this weekend's Gospel, Jesus asks his friends what people are saying about him. The responses are predictable: "Many people think you are a hero of Jewish history, returning in their hour of need". Peter, however, is inspired to say "You are the Christ", that is, "You are the Messiah, the unique savior sent from God".

Jesus tells them to keep his identity a secret. Why? Because he still has to submit to his passion. Only by surrendering himself entirely to suffering and death, and burial too, can he be transformed into the triumphant risen Christ. He has to accept annihilation, trusting totally in God. He has to disappear. Then God will restore him to life, but a very different life. He will be the Lord of creation, the judge of the living and the dead, enthroned with God in heaven.

Scripture scholars have a special phrase for describing all of these events. They refer to them as "the Paschal mystery". It simply means that Jesus has led the way, and Jesus has shown us the way.

This, he says, is the way to heaven: becoming humble, giving ourselves into the hands of God, trusting God even when life becomes very dark, and letting God be God, that is: "letting go and letting God".

A great Spanish saint of the sixteenth century wrote about this. He is St. John of the Cross. He often spoke about "the dark night of the senses" and the "dark night of the soul". If one wishes to draw close to God, he said, if one wants to live in union with God, then a person has to sacrifice a lot of physical and material

comfort. One may even have to endure the feeling that God has gone away and left one stranded. God does not do that, of course, but it means that now one's prayer will become a prayer of pure trust. And, eventually it all comes right. But when it does, then we will have become a different person, transformed by the power of God: we will have had our own personal Good Friday, and God will give us our own personal Easter. In the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The Lord is coming to my help, who dares condemn me?"

Jesus is our brother, and Jesus is our savior. Jesus frees us from the daily challenges of life. Jesus gives us consolation and hope. Jesus gives us peace.

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