

The Twelfth Sunday of Ordinary Time June 20, 2021

How would you answer the question that the apostles ask at the end of today's gospel: "Who then is this whom even the wind and the sea obey?"

Jesus is different from any other religious leader who ever walked the earth. No one else has ever claimed to be God. Confucius and the Buddha claimed to offer wisdom and enlightenment, but they never claimed to be the ultimate source of that wisdom and enlightenment. Mohammed claimed to have a revelation from God. But he never claimed to be God himself.

In contrast, Jesus offers something more than wisdom, enlightenment, and revelation. He claims to be God. Not only does He claim to be God but He shows Himself to be God by performing mighty deeds that only God can perform. We see this on full display in today's gospel as Jesus calms a fierce storm with only a word.

Throughout the three years of His ministry, He also showed it by healing the sick, raising the dead, forgiving sins, and knowing people's thoughts. Ultimately, He showed that He was God by rising from the dead. The divinity of Jesus is not something the disciples cooked up later. Rather, it was a claim that Jesus Himself made when He said, "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30) and when He said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9).

And so, we have to make a choice when it comes to Jesus. Do we believe Him? Do we believe that He is who He says He is? Do we believe that He is God?

The temptation for many in the world today is to say that Jesus is only a wise teacher. That is not who He claims to be. If He is not who He says He is - if He is not God - then He is a fraud. If He claims to be God and really isn't, then He is not a wise teacher or a good man but a crazy person.

So, we again are faced with the question - Is Jesus God or is He a fraud?

Now, if we say that we believe that Jesus is God, we are also saying that we believe that He is Truth itself. This is what He says of Himself - "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). If He is God, then everything that He says is true. Nothing He says can be false. If we truly believe that He is God, then we must accept and put into practice everything that He taught. If I believe that Jesus is God then I cannot say that I accept His commandment that we love one another but not accept His commandment to turn the other cheek. In the same way, I cannot say that I believe that Jesus is God but that I don't have to be a part of the Church which He established. If Jesus is God and we believe in Him, then we have to accept everything that He taught as truth and

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put into practice everything that He preached.

It sounds daunting - to live the life Jesus calls us to. But there is more to the story. Because Jesus is God, because He is All-Powerful, He can change us. Confucius can teach us wisdom but he cannot make us wise. The Buddha can show us the way to enlightenment but he cannot enlighten us. Mohammed can pass on revelation to us but he cannot reveal God to us. But, Jesus can do all things. He can teach us wisdom and make us wise. He can teach us how to be good and He can also make us good. Most importantly, Jesus can teach us about the Father and the Holy Spirit, and He can also show us the Father and send the Holy Spirit to us. Jesus has the power to change us.

This is the point of the reading today from St Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." The God who created heaven and earth, re-creates us in Jesus Christ. The God who renews the world, renews us.

How does that happen? St Paul says, "...we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died." Whenever St Paul says "we have died" or uses death imagery for people who are still alive, he is talking about baptism. Through baptism, the death of Jesus is applied to us. The debt that we owe to Sin is paid in full by Jesus' blood and credited to us in baptism. Sin and death have no more power over us because Jesus conquered them by His cross and resurrection and gave us a share in His victory when we were baptized. In baptism, we are made a new creation, freed from sin, and given the hope of everlasting life.

There is an implication to all this, as St Paul tells us: "He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." If we believe that Jesus is truly God, if we believe that He died and rose again to empower us to live the gospel, then we must no longer live for ourselves but for Him. We must put Him and His will ahead of our own. We must make Him and not ourselves the center of our lives.

Here's the thing - we will do so willingly and gladly when we experience His love in our hearts. Because, unlike any other religious leader who has ever lived, Jesus invites us not only to believe in Him but to be in relationship with Him. He invites us to be loved by Him. Once we have known the love of God in Jesus Christ, we will desire nothing less.

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Jesus makes a startling and bold claim - that He is God made man. All of us must now make a choice. Do we believe Him? Will we follow Him? If we say “yes”, we will not only be His followers but His friends. If we say “yes”, then we are being transformed into a new creation by His power as God.

The same Jesus who calmed the sea, who healed the sick, who raised the dead, who died on the cross for us, and who was raised from the dead will make Himself present here in the form of bread and wine. It is His Body and Blood that we receive in Holy Communion. He gives Himself totally to us to remake us in His image and likeness. If we believe, then we will be made a new creation. Sin and death will have no more power over us. We will live no longer for ourselves but for Him. And we will live with the hope of everlasting glory.