

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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by The Reverend Paul Whitehouse

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

As I read the Gospel for today, a thought entered my mind. (dangerous, I know).

What if, instead of a homily, we had an online quiz instead? Don't worry about how long the quiz is; it has only one question. The same question for everyone.

"Who do you say Jesus is?" Could you have answered that question? In agreement with Peter, some of you may have used the same words used in our Gospel: "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Of course, some may have said: "Jesus is my Lord and Saviour." Or perhaps, "Jesus is my friend." Who do you say Jesus is? Could you answer that right now?

Yes, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Jesus is your Lord and Saviour. But what do you mean by that? What do you mean by those titles? Our answers may be more complete if we simply list words that describe what we mean. Jesus is almighty, loving, gentle, compassionate, understanding, forgiving. Jesus is my helper, my guide, my God. There used to be an expression, and maybe it's still in use. "Jesus is the answer!"

Children often ask wonderfully deep religious questions in simple language. Will my dog go to heaven? If Jesus is in heaven, how can he be here too? My grandpa never went to church with us before he died; is he in heaven now? Did Noah really live to be six hundred years old? How would you answer these questions?

Adults also have questions of faith. Many of us talk about the list of questions we want to ask God when we get to heaven. If Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, why is there so much pain in this world? Why is there

suffering? Why is there hunger? Why do people fight with one another? (Of course, I'm always afraid God will ask me the same questions!)

Some people used to have a bumper sticker on their car that said, "Jesus is the Answer!" The answer to what? To my loneliness, my feelings of inadequacy as a parent, or my fear of an illness like COVID-19, or even cancer? If Jesus is the answer, why is all this happening to me?

Sometimes we are too quick with our answers. We don't want people to know that we just aren't sure what we mean when we say Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. We don't want people to think we aren't strong in our faith. We don't want to seem illiterate when it comes to the Bible. As people of God, we feel we need to know the answers to questions of faith. So when difficult questions of faith arise, we are tempted to say Jesus is the answer, and then change the subject. If we say any more, someone might realize we don't have all the answers.

Jesus is the answer. But how is Jesus the answer? How is Jesus the answer to a young girl shunned by others because of her race? How is Jesus the answer for a mother who finds herself dealing with one tragedy after another? How is Jesus the answer for the little boy who is concerned about his grandfather who never went to church? When questions like these arise, God doesn't expect us to have all the answers. We can confess our faith. But it's OK to say, "I don't know. I don't completely know how God works.

As we continue to search for answers, we must not be afraid to ask questions and to admit to one another that we don't know all the answers. Continue to read the Scriptures, continue to watch for God's presence in our lives, and look for answers together.

"You are the Messiah!" Your faith enables you to make this proclamation, even if you don't completely understand what it means. God will bless you, and eventually, provide you with the answers to all your questions. Why? Because Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!