

12 Sunday of the year C : June 19, 2016

Who is Jesus in relation to us? Who are we in relation to Jesus?

A 15-year-old boy and his father were driving past a tiny airport in a small town in Ohio. Suddenly a low-flying plane spun out of control and nose-dived into the runway.

The boy yelled, “Dad! Dad! Stop the car!” Minutes later the boy was pulling the pilot out of the plane. It was a 20-year-old student flier, who had been practicing takeoffs and landings. The young man died in the boy’s arms.

When the boy got home, he threw his arms around his mother and cried, “Mom, he was my friend! He was only 20!” That night the boy was still too shocked to eat supper. He went to his room, closed the door, and lay on his bed.

The boy had been working part-time in a drugstore. Every penny he made he spent on flying lessons. His goal was to get his pilot’s license when he turned 16.

The boy’s parents wondered what effect the tragedy would have on their son. Would he stop taking lessons, or would he continue? They agreed that the decision would have to be his.

Two days later the boy’s mother brought some freshly baked cookies to her son’s room.

On his dresser she saw an open notebook. It was one he had kept from childhood.

Across the top of the page was written, in big letters, “The Character of Jesus.”

Beneath was listed a series of qualities:

“Jesus was sinless; he was humble;
he championed the poor;
he was unselfish;
he was close to God ...”

The mother saw that in her son’s hour of decision he was turning to Jesus for guidance. Then she turned to her son and said,

“What have you decided about flying?”

The boy looked into his mother’s eyes and said, “Mom, I hope you and Dad will understand, but with God’s help, I must continue to fly.”

That boy was Neil Armstrong.

And on July 20, 1969, he became the first human being to walk on the moon.

Few people who watched that historic event on television knew that one of the reasons

Neil Armstrong was walking on the moon

was Jesus. They didn’t know that it was from Jesus that he drew strength and guidance to make a crucial teenage decision that was now responsible for his walking on the moon.

I like that story because it answers Jesus’ question

in today’s gospel—“Who do you say that I am?”—in a way that we are not used to hearing it answered. Young Neil Armstrong didn’t answer the question by saying to Jesus, “You are the Son of God,” or “You are the Messiah,” or “You are the Second Person of the Trinity.” He answered it much more simply.

He said:

“You are a sinless person. You are a selfless person. You are a person who cares. You are a person who is close to God.”

In other words, Neil Armstrong didn't give a theological answer to the question "Who do you say that I am?" He gave a personal answer.

He looked into his own heart and described how he experienced Jesus in his personal life. Each one of us must do the same thing.

We must answer Jesus' question: - "Who do you say that I am?"— by looking into our heart and describing how we experience Jesus in our personal life. And that experience is different for each of us.

For some of us, Jesus is a person we can turn to for guidance in times of confusion. For others, he is someone we can turn to for strength in times of trial. For still others, he is someone who understands us, even when we don't understand ourselves.

And this brings us to the second half of today's gospel. If the first half of the gospel asks the question "How do we experience Jesus?" the second half asks the question "How does Jesus experience us?" "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must... take up his cross daily and follow me."

These words of Jesus challenge us to ask ourselves, "How does Jesus experience us? Does he experience us as his followers?"

In other words, do we pick up our cross daily and follow Jesus? Or to put it yet another way— a more practical way; do we imitate Jesus in our daily life? Are we for other people what Jesus is for us?

Are we a person to whom others can turn for strength in times of trial?
Are we a person to whom others can turn for guidance in times of confusion?
Are we a person to whom others can turn for help in times of need?
Are we this kind of person, especially to the members of our own family?

In brief, today's gospel puts before us two important questions.

The first is,

How do we experience Jesus?

Do we experience him as Neil Armstrong did: as someone who plays an important part in our daily life?

Or is Jesus merely someone we think about for an hour on Sunday and forget about the rest of the week?

The second question is even more important. How does Jesus experience us?

Does he experience us as his follower?

Or does he merely experience us as his fan?

Are we someone who imitates Jesus?

Or are we someone who merely admires him? Do we pick up our cross and follow him daily? Or do we merely sit on the sidelines and applaud him as he carries his cross alone?

These are the two important questions the gospel puts before each one of us today: **Who is Jesus in our life?**

Who are we in Jesus' life?

No one can answer those questions for us.

We must answer them ourselves.

Let's close with a prayer to Jesus.

"Lord!

Be a bright flame before me.

Be a guiding star above me.

Be a smooth path below me.

Be a kindly shepherd behind me.

Be these things today—tonight—and forever."