

21st Sunday in OT Cycle A, “*Deeds Determine Destiny...*”

Isaiah 22:15, Romans 11:33-36, Matthew 16:13-20

LET ME SET THE SCENE FOR YOU:

Today, the Son of God finds himself 25 miles outside of familiar territory. He and his disciples are standing right smack in the middle of an area known as **Caesarea Philippi**, a place that those more learned in the importance of geography recognize this place as the ONE AREA where – during the days of Christ – nearly every **Religious Association of the time** intersected.

And so the first thing we need to imagine is that: today there stands before us a man by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, a PENNILESS GALILEAN CARPENTER born in a cave, surrounded by 12 Ordinary Men held in no esteem in the eyes of the world – **only one of which was EDUCATED** – and that would be Judas Iscariot. He's the so-called ‘**Smart One**.’ The one who will soon go on to **BETRAY THE MASTER**...

Meanwhile, hostility is growing all around them as **NEWS is spreading** about how a good number of Jewish Leaders are plotting and planning on destroying this REBEL ROUSING JESUS for causing Division and disturbing the Peace.

There you have it, and there they are standing in the **Heart of Caesarea Philippi** – a place that serves as a backdrop to a set of questions and answers which to this day, have served to carve the history of mankind upon a course that can be denied by no one...

Standing there with **ALL THE GREEK GODS** looking down upon Him, walking along a road **LITTERED WITH TEMPLES OF SYRIAN GOD'S**, close to where there exists a white marble splendor of a structure known as the home of Caesar – he who claims to be Divine and DEMANDS to be Worshipped by all... and that's not all – the Israelites recognize **Caesarea Philippi** as being the place where **THE SPRINGS OF THE RIVER JORDAN** bubble out from. (*The river Jordan being the most important river in all of Judaism, the river within which John the Baptist baptized and where the Christ was baptized.*)

THERE THEY ALL STAND – Jesus of Nazareth and his Disciples – right SMACK in the middle of this Intersection Of Deities, Wonders Of Nature, and Mythical Gods:

And there Jesus asks those closest to Him:

“Who do you say that I am?”

Who's He really asking that question to? He's asking that question to all those whom He has called to follow Him, of those who've eaten and shared time with Him along life's journey – in other words – He's asking that question to each and every single one of us... and **NO ONE LEAVES THIS WORLD** – the PLACE where every mythical deity under the sun intersects – NO ONE leaves **The Heart of Caesarea Philippi** known as planet Earth without answering this question in some shape or form and **I don't care who you are or what your current belief system even looks like!**

At this very moment, the RESURRECTED MAN Jesus of Nazareth stands this day in the midst of **Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islamism, Gnosticism, Atheism, Satanism, Oh and let's not forget – the New Age, the Occult, and Wicca** – the list goes on and on, as a matter of fact there's over 4200 world religions identified these days and **RIGHT SMACK IN THE HEART OF THIS INTERSECTION POINT** stands One Man asking ONE QUESTION...

And it's a question that determines the fate of every individual who ignores or responds to it – either way – **THE DESTINY OF ONE and ALL** is wrapped up in a SINGLE QUESTION posed by a SINGLE MAN this day...

Over the last two years I was blessed to journey along side **Len Ruggins...** a parishioner of ours at St. Peter's battling cancer. He came to Mass last Sunday and then that evening, one of his internal tumors started bleeding and he was **RUSHED BY AMBULANCE TO THE HOSPITAL**. On Tuesday afternoon I went to the foothills and

had a great visit with him. I bestowed upon him the greatest gift that God has made available to all peoples, **THE LAST RITES** – and after having prayed the **Apostolic Pardon** over him, I assured him that the state of his soul was from that moment on was the same **AS IF HE'D JUST BEEN BAPTIZED!** He smiled from ear to ear while staring in front of him as he said: "**a brand-new life, a brand-new start...**"

He shared with me how he'd been reflecting a lot lately about the words he wanted ETCHED UPON HIS TOMBSTONE, his **EPITAPH**. Here's what he came up with:

"Our deeds in this life will determine our destiny in the next." 2x

Within 48 hours of my walking out his Hospital Room, **Len experienced THE FIRST DAY of his Brand-New Eternal Life in the Kingdom of Heaven**. We will be celebrating his funeral mass this Tuesday morning at 11 AM at St. Peter's. Pray for Len and his family...

I've been a priest long enough to know that it doesn't matter who we might think we are in this world or if we espouse a **Belief System** that is completely different than anything else that exists in the known universe – **just as there was an Appointed Day and Time for our BIRTH so there is an Appointed Day and Time for our DEATH...**

He's still standing there... Right smack in the middle of **THE INTERSECTION POINT WHERE ALL BELIEF SYSTEMS CONVERGE** and He's asking you and I one question: "**Who do you say that I am?**"

There once was a **RICH MAN** who wanted to affect the quality of life of one that was less fortunate. He came across a **Poor Carpenter** and he hired him to build a house.

"**Now this isn't just any old house you're going to be building here,**" said the **RICH MAN**. "I want you to build this house for a **VERY SPECIAL PERSON**. Spare no expense and use only the finest building materials, hire the best workmen you can find – **build me a Masterpiece!** I will be traveling for a number of months, and when I return I expect the house to be completed.

The **Poor Carpenter** saw this as a great stroke of luck - an incredible opportunity to make LOTS OF EXTRA MONEY! And so he **skipped on building materials, hired unskilled labour** and paid them as little as he could. He covered over their mistakes with paint and plaster – he cut every corner he could.

When the **RICH MAN** returned, the **Poor Carpenter** handed him the keys and said: "I followed your instructions and I built you a **Masterpiece** for that **VERY SPECIAL PERSON OF YOURS**."

"**I'm glad you did,**" said the **RICH MAN**. He then handed the keys back over to the **Poor Carpenter** saying: "**That VERY special person I had this house built for – IS YOU!**"

"Who do you say that I am?" How we answer that question determines the **BUILDING MATERIALS OF OUR DAILY DEEDS** that we all make use of each and every day as we build up the Destiny that awaits us in the life that is to come.

St. Rose of Lima was blessed throughout the course of her life to have the **Master Builder** speak to her as I am speaking with you this day. In her writings, she penned down the following:

"Our Lord and Savior lifted up his voice and said with incomparable majesty: 'Let all men know that Grace comes after **TRIBULATION**. Let them know that without the **BURDEN OF AFFLICTIONS** it is impossible to reach the Heights of Grace. Let them know that the Gifts of Grace increase **as the struggles increase**. Let men take care not to stray and be deceived. This is the only True Stairway to Paradise, and without the Cross they can find no road to climb to Heaven..."

Did you get that? “Take care not to stray and be deceived - the only TRUE STAIRWAY TO PARADISE is the Cross – and without the Cross, you will find NO ROAD that climbs to Heaven...”

Today, the only human being that has ever RESURRECTED FROM THE DEAD stands right smack in the middle of **the intersection point where over 4200 world religions collide** – and it's from there that he asks of us all a Single Question:

"Who do you say that I am?" It's a question that's not really answerable by words...

It's a question that's answerable by deeds...

"Our deeds - LIVED OUT WITH FAITH - in this life WILL DETERMINE our Destiny in the next..."