

***Who is the Son of Man?***

1 Samuel 16:1b, 6–7, 10–13a

Psalm 23:1–6

Ephesians 5:8–14

John 9:1, 6–9, 13–17, 34–38

Homily for Laetare Sunday

March 25-26

In today's Gospel, we are asked to answer the most basic question. Who is Jesus Christ? Jesus himself answers this question in the most explicit way when in response to the blind man we hear this exchange:

***Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." 38 He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.***

Now here is something important to understand about Jesus. 78 times in the Gospels he refers to himself as the Son of Man. It is his favourite self-designation. When we understand what Jesus meant by this title we will in turn be able to properly answer the question: "Who is Jesus Christ?"

We first come across the Son of Man title in a passage from the Old Testament, the Book of Daniel. He is an exalted figure who comes to stand before the one described as the Ancient of Days. The Ancient of Days is the Everlasting God. Daniel tells us:

***I saw in the night visions,  
and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
there came one like a son of man,  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.  
14 And to him was given dominion  
and glory and kingdom,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him;  
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed.***

So when in today's Gospel Jesus asks, do you believe in the Son of Man, and the man enquires who is he sir, and Jesus says: You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he; Jesus

clearly answers this question in unequivocal terms. I am the one who has everlasting dominion, the promised figure of Daniel chapter 7.

But here is the point I want you to grasp. Jesus knows who he is. Remember he uses this designation Son of Man 78 times in the Gospels. But many people do not see Jesus clearly as does the man who can now see. The more important sight this man gains is not his physical sight but his spiritual sight. John tells us he said:

***“Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.***

The religious leaders in Jerusalem come to a very different conclusion: They first of all conclude that:

***“This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.”***

Later on in the story they become even more vehement in their rejection of Jesus and declare:

***We know that this man is a sinner.***

Then they state definitively:

***We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.***

Listen then to how the man who had been healed challenges their thinking:

***The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” 34 They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.***

So starting with their last assertion, we do not know where this man is from, moving logically to the impossibility of Jesus being a sinner because of what he has done, the man with sight shows conclusively that Jesus is from God. But alas they will not listen to his reason and logic and dismiss him by branding him a reprobate sinner who has nothing to teach them and exclude him from the synagogue.

This is something people do all the time when trying to answer the question, who is Jesus? They do not want to carefully weigh what we know. In our day it is not so much that they would accuse Jesus of being a sinner. No, in our day, the conclusion is he was a great religious teacher but not more than that. However, this answer is as wrong as the one deduced by the Pharisees.

Jesus is either God or a bad man. What we cannot say is that he was a good man and not God.

For if he was only a man, he had no right to call himself the Son of Man. If he is only a man and made this kind of claim, then he is not good. Rather he is a liar or a lunatic.<sup>1</sup>

Let me explain what I mean. Now what would we think of a person who went around making these claims today, I am the Son of Man. Certainly not that he was a good man or a sage. There are only two possibilities: he either speaks the truth or not. If he speaks the truth, he is God and the case is closed. We must believe him and worship him. If he does not speak the truth, then he is not God but a mere man. But a mere man who wants you to worship him as God is not a good man. He is a very bad man indeed, either morally or intellectually. If he knows that he is not God, then he is morally bad, a liar trying deliberately to deceive you into blasphemy. If he does not know that he is not God, if he sincerely thinks he is God, then he is intellectually bad—in fact, insane.

A measure of your insanity is the size of the gap between what you think you are and what you really are. If I think I am the greatest priest in the Catholic Church I am only an arrogant fool; if I think I am Napoleon, I am probably over the edge; if I think I am a butterfly, I am fully embarked from the sunny shores of sanity. But if I think I am God, I am even more insane because the gap between anything finite and the infinite God is even greater than the gap between any two finite things, even a man and a butterfly.

The argument can simply and memorably be termed the “trilemma”: “Lord, liar, or lunatic?” Those are the only options. Well, then, why not liar or lunatic? But almost no one who has read the Gospels can honestly and seriously consider that option. The savviness, the canniness, the human wisdom, the attractiveness of Jesus emerge from the Gospels with unavoidable force to any but the most hardened and prejudiced reader. Compare Jesus with liars like the Reverend Sun Myung Moon or lunatics like the dying Nietzsche. Jesus has in abundance precisely those qualities that liars and lunatics most conspicuously lack.

His practical wisdom—his ability to read human hearts, to understand people and the real, unspoken question behind their words, his ability to heal people’s spirits, as well as their bodies;

His deep and winning love—his passionate compassion, his ability to attract people and make them feel at home and forgiven, his authority, “not as the scribes”; and above all his ability to astonish—his unpredictability, his creativity. Liars and lunatics are all so dull and predictable! No one who knows both the Gospels and human beings can seriously entertain the possibility that Jesus was a liar or a lunatic, a bad man.

No, the unbeliever almost always believes that Jesus was a good man, a prophet, a sage. Well then, if he was a sage, you can trust him and believe the essential things he says. And the essential thing he says is that he is the divine Savior of the world and that you must come to

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<sup>1</sup> I am appreciative to Peter Kreeft and his article for the next part of the homily.  
<http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics/christ-divinity.htm>

him for salvation. Remember 78 times he says he is the fulfillment of Daniel 7. If he is a sage, you must accept his essential teaching as true. If his teaching is false, then he is not a sage.

This is the question that is more important than any other. We can either like the Pharisees conclude we do not know where Jesus comes from and deem him a sinner; or like most modern people, declare him a good man, but not God. But such conclusions do not look to the heart of the matter and see what Samuel saw when he had David before him. Here is the Lord's anointed. David anticipated the truly anointed one the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we look with the eyes of true faith, when we allow for the use of logic and sound reasoning to govern our thinking about Jesus Christ then with the blind man who can now see we will answer the question: Who is Jesus Christ:

***Lord I believe and will worship Jesus.***

What difference does it make as to how we answer this question: Who is Jesus? St Paul tells us clearly. To declare "Lord I believe means that we are now children of the light. We have been given the insight to see who Jesus really is. This means that the rest of our earthly life is to be spent in what Paul describes as the pursuit of all that is good, pleasing and true. We are to grow in lives of virtue and disassociate ourselves from those who participate in the unfruitful works of darkness. This is a daily work and one that we are inspired to do because of who Jesus is. We are to awake from spiritual slumber, rise from the death of sin so that Christ will shine on us.

Those who live this way can increasingly sing the Laetare song that marks this fourth Sunday of Lent:

***"Rejoice Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning"***