



Homily 24th Sunday Ordinary Time (B)

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My sisters and brothers in Christ,

Today's passage of the Gospel is well known to all of us especially because it has the most important question that Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?"

First Jesus asked the disciples in a general way, "Who do people say that I am?" and the disciples responded with the popular conventional replies of the Jewish people still looking for the Messiah: "John de Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets" But then Jesus gets more personal and ask them 'who do you say that I am? St. Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says, 'You are the Christ'.

It is a personal question that demands a personal answer. I am sure that we want to say with St. Peter: "You are the Christ". But today we should ask ourselves if our lives are consistent with what we are saying.

Because it is not a matter of just talking, but showing with deeds our faith in Jesus Christ. The Apostles believed in Jesus and showed their commitment with deeds of faith to the point of giving their lives for Him.

Faith in Christ and deeds of love. That is also the message from the other readings of today's Mass. In the **1st reading** the Prophet Isaiah is talking about the Messiah as the suffering servant. The words of Isaiah's servant are Jesus' words -- as He gives himself to be shamed and beaten, trusting that God will be His help. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Then in the **2nd** reading the Apostle James clearly says that faith without deeds is dead: "What good it is, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?"

Let's ask God for his grace that we all can say with words and deeds: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!

In the second part of today's Gospel, Jesus tells the Apostles what it means to be his disciple. It is striking. Just the opposite of what anyone will do to encourage people to do something.

He starts telling them that he will suffer and be killed. Then after rebuking St. Peter, who was trying to be nice to him, "He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them: whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow

me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it'.

I'm sure that the Apostles and the crowd were surprised. They probably couldn't understand what he was saying. But then, after the Resurrection everything became clear. To obtain eternal life, we have to follow Christ, to die to ourselves to live in Christ.

This weekend we had here in San Antonio the Women's Conference of the Pilgrim Center of Hope. They asked me to make a presentation. I talked to them about the importance of their vocation in the Church and society.

I shared with them the story of Maria de la Luz Camacho González. She was a very talented and beautiful laywoman who dedicated her life to serving the Gospel as a catechist.

In 1934, during the dark days of the persecution of the Church in Mexico, a mob of revolutionary thugs known as the Camisas Rojas, came to burn down Maria's church, San Juan Batista, in the Coyoacán section of Mexico City. They came during the Sunday morning children's Mass.

Maria organized a group of parishioners to block the entrance to the church. She told the mob: "We have no fear. We are ready to die for Christ and we would be happy to do that!"

They gunned Maria down on the steps, but her martyrdom saved the church and the children. She was 27 years old. Her last words were *!Viva Cristo Rey! !Viva Santa Maria de Guadalupe!*

What a courageous example of love and faithfulness! We all are called to love God with everything we have and to love our neighbors as ourselves. To be willing to lay down our lives for our love.

Most people are not called to give their lives for God, as Maria de la Luz was, but we all have to be heroic in the ordinary little deeds of service and sacrifice.

My sisters and brothers the time for saints is not past! In every age our Lord is calling out for saints. In our day, he is calling you. Our Lord is asking each of you the same question that he asked the Apostles: Who do you say that I am?

As Disciples of Christ we carry the cross when we are willing to risk something of ourselves to follow the Gospel values.

We carry the cross when we are willing to reach out to another, going out of our way, to help and serve without conditions. We carry the cross when we live by the truth, even if it

is not popular. We carry the cross when we accept happily God's will for us, whatever it is.

It is in accepting the cross that we have life. Indeed that we are born to eternal life. Our participation in the Cross of Christ takes us to be united with Christ in a unique way and it will gain eternal life for us.

Let's not forget that Jesus told us the Kingdom grows quietly in our midst, almost unseen—except for those who have eyes to see, those who have the eyes of faith. The Kingdom grows by every little act of faith you make, by every little thing you do for the love for God.

Everywhere you are you are called to proclaim Christ by your words and deeds. You are to be witnesses to the power of his resurrection. The power of his love.

The encounter with Christ is never for us alone. It is a gift of love that we must share with others. Not only by our words, but by our example, by our service.

One more example of heroic fidelity is Mary, Our Blessed Mother. Today, we ask her to help us not to be afraid of the Cross, but to embrace it as personal way to respond to Jesus' question with the words of St. Peter: "You are the Christ, the son of the living God" and we will have real life here on earth and then eternal life in heaven. Amen.