21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, A

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

One of the most important questions in the entire Gospel is the question Jesus asks His disciples today: **"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"**

The disciples give Him several answers. Some say John the Baptist. Others say Elijah. Others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Then Jesus makes the question personal: **"But who do you say that I am?"** That is a very different question.

It is easy to talk about what other people believe. It is easy to say what our parents taught us, what our teachers told us, what the Church teaches, or what society says about Jesus.

But Jesus does not ask, **"What have you heard about me?" He asks: "Who do you say that I am?"** And that is a question that every Christian must answer.

Peter speaks up: **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** Peter gets it right. Jesus is not simply a good teacher. He is not simply a prophet. He is not simply a wise man from history. He is the Christ—the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

And notice what Jesus says next: **"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father."** Peter's faith is ultimately a gift from God. And that is true for us as well. Faith is not something we manufacture by ourselves.

God reaches out to us first. God gives us the grace to recognize who Jesus is and to respond to Him.

Sometimes we can take our faith for granted. We may have grown up Catholic. We may have been baptized as infants. We may have received First Communion and Confirmation. We may come to Mass every Sunday. But there is a difference between being Catholic by habit and being a disciple of Jesus by faith.

The question Jesus asks today challenges us to look deeper: Who is Jesus in my life? Is He simply someone I think about on Sunday? Or is He truly the Lord of my life? Do I trust Him when life becomes difficult? Do I turn to Him when I am afraid? Do I forgive because He asks me to forgive? Do I serve because He asks me to serve? Do I love because He asks me to love?

There is something else very important in this Gospel. Jesus says: **"You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church."** Peter is given enormous responsibility. Jesus gives him the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. He gives him authority to lead and serve the Church. And yet, if we know the rest of the Gospel story, we know that Peter is not perfect. Peter will misunderstand Jesus. Peter will sometimes act impulsively. Peter will become afraid. And eventually, when Jesus is arrested, Peter will deny Him three times.

So why does Jesus choose Peter? Because God does not wait until people are perfect before He calls them. That should give all of us hope.

Sometimes we think, **“I am not good enough for God.” “I have made too many mistakes.” “I don't know enough about my faith.” “I have failed too many times.”** But look at Peter. Jesus knew Peter's weaknesses before He chose him. Jesus knew Peter would fail. And Jesus still called him. The same is true for us.

God knows our weaknesses. He knows our mistakes. He knows the things we are ashamed of. He knows the areas of our lives where we struggle. And yet He continues to call us. The question is not whether we are perfect. The question is whether we are willing to follow Him.

Jesus gives Peter the keys of the Kingdom. The image of the keys is important. Keys represent authority and responsibility. But Christian authority is never supposed to be about power, prestige, or control. It is about service. This is something that Jesus will make very clear throughout the Gospels. The greatest person is the one who serves.

That applies not only to the Pope, bishops, and priests. It applies to every Christian. Parents have authority in their families—but that authority should be expressed through love and sacrifice. Teachers have authority in their classrooms—but their goal should be to help their students grow. Leaders have authority—but leadership should mean serving those entrusted to them. Even in ordinary daily life, we are constantly given opportunities to serve.

Sometimes we think holiness requires doing something extraordinary. But often holiness looks very ordinary. It looks like someone visiting a

sick family member. It looks like helping an elderly neighbor. It looks like volunteering at church. It looks like quietly doing something good when nobody will ever know. That is Christian leadership.

Jesus says: **“Upon this rock I will build my Church.”** Notice that Jesus says, **“my Church.”** The Church belongs to Christ. We sometimes hear people say, “I believe in Jesus, but I don't need the Church.” But Jesus did not simply leave us a collection of teachings and tell us to figure everything out on our own. He established a Church. He gave the apostles a mission. He gave Peter a particular leadership role.

The Church is made up of human beings—and because of that, the Church will always have imperfect people. We see that throughout history. But the Church is also Christ's instrument in the world. Through the Church, Christ continues to preach the Gospel. Through the Church, Christ gives us the sacraments. Through the Church, Christ offers us His forgiveness. Through the Church, Christ gives us the Eucharist—His Body and Blood. Through the Church, Christ continues to call people to holiness. That is why our relationship with Jesus cannot be separated from our relationship with His Church.

And so, we return to the question: **“Who do you say that I am?”** Jesus is asking every one of us. Not just priests. Not just theologians. Not just people who have studied the Bible. Every one of us. And our answer matters because how we answer that question determines how we live.

If Jesus is simply a teacher, then we can choose which teachings we like. If Jesus is simply a prophet, then His words are interesting but perhaps optional. But if Jesus is truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, then everything changes. If He is Lord, then I need to trust Him. If He is Lord, then I need to take my faith seriously. If He is Lord, then Sunday Mass is not simply an obligation—it is an encounter with the living God. If He is Lord, then the Eucharist is not simply bread and wine—it is Christ giving Himself to us. If He is Lord, then prayer cannot be something we do only when we have problems.

And this becomes especially important when life does not go according to our plans. It is easy to say, **"Jesus is Lord,"** when everything is going well. But what happens when we receive bad news? What happens when someone we love becomes sick? What happens when a marriage struggles? What happens when we lose a job? What happens when we pray, and God seems silent? Those are the moments when our answer to Jesus' question becomes real: **"Who do you say that I am?"**

If Jesus is truly the Son of the living God, then even in difficult moments we can say: **"Lord, I don't understand, but I trust You." "Lord, I don't know what will happen, but I know You are with me." "Lord, I am afraid, but I will not abandon You."** That is faith.

Peter's faith was not perfect. But Peter kept coming back to Jesus. And that is what God asks of us.

Today, Jesus does not ask us to give Him a complicated theological answer. He asks something much simpler: **“Who do you say that I am?”** Maybe our answer today is: **“You are my Lord.”** Maybe it is: **“You are my Savior.”** Maybe it is: **“You are the one I need when I am afraid.”** Maybe it is: **“You are the one who gives meaning to my life.”** Or perhaps our faith is struggling, and our honest prayer is simply: **“Jesus, help me to believe.”**

Whatever our answer, let us bring it to Him. Because Jesus is not looking for perfect people. He is looking for people who are willing to follow Him. Peter was imperfect. The apostles were imperfect. The saints were imperfect. And yet God worked through them. God can work through us too.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

So, as we come to the Eucharist today, let us hear Jesus asking each of us: **“Who do you say that I am?”** And may our lives give the answer: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. You are my Lord and my Savior.” Amen.**