

## **Homily for 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, August 30, 2020**

In the gospel last week, Peter declared of Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” I would like to spend some time with that. Jesus as the Christ (the Messiah), Jesus as the Son of God, is a theme found often throughout the gospels. In Matthew alone, examples include:

Chapter one - The genealogy concludes with, “It was of her that Jesus who was called the Messiah was born.”

Chapter two – After Christ’s birth the Holy Family fled to Egypt to fulfill the prophecy, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

Chapter three – After His baptism, a voice from the heavens said, “This is my beloved Son. My favor rests on him.”

Chapter four – In the desert, the devil started two of the temptations by saying, “If you are the Son of God.”

Chapter eight – When demons were possessing two men, they cried: “Why meddle with us, Son of God?”

Chapter nine – Two blind men came up to Him saying, “Son of David, have pity on us.” The Christ was to be a descendant of the House of David.

Chapter ten – He says, “Whoever acknowledges me before men I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven.”

Chapter eleven – He declares, “No one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son...”

Chapter twelve – He says, “Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father...”

Chapter fifteen – The Canaanite woman says, “Lord, Son of David, have pity on me!” And she did him homage – a word used for how the Magi reacted when they found the Infant Jesus; which commentators usually explain as “worship.”

Here in Chapter sixteen – Peter’s declaration.

Chapter seventeen – At the Transfiguration, a voice out of the cloud says, “This is my beloved Son on whom my favor rests. Listen to him.”

Chapter twenty – When the mother of James and John asked Jesus that in His kingdom they will sit by Him, His reply is, “That is for those to whom it has been reserved by my Father.”

And two blind men call out to Him, “Lord, Son of David, have pity on us!”

Chapter twenty-one – When He entered Jerusalem, with palm branches people cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!”

Chapter twenty-two – Jesus points out that when David wrote Psalm One Hundred-ten, it started, “The Lord said to my lord...” Children called their fathers and grandfathers “lord,” not the other way around. So how could David call His descendant “Lord” unless the Messiah was something more than human?

Chapter twenty-six – When He is being arrested, he tells His disciples, “Do you not suppose I can call on my Father to provide at a moment’s notice more than twelve legions of angels?”

Before the Sanhedrin, the high priest asked, “...whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”

Chapter twenty-seven – at His crucifixion, He was taunted with the words, “...he claimed, ‘I am God’s Son.’”

At His death, the Centurion who was keeping watch said, “Clearly, this was the Son of God.”

Chapter twenty-eight – after the Resurrection, He instructs the eleven, who did Him homage, with the words, “...Baptize them in the name ‘of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’”

All of these illustrate that Matthew wanted us to understand that the long-awaited Anointed, when he came, was more than we could imagine. He was also the Son of God! Jesus came to save everyone from sin and death. The reason crowds followed Him was because they understood, at least for a short time.

==\_==\_==\_==

A brief change of subject.

“And they lived happily ever after.” A lot of fairytales end on this positive note of victory and everything being resolved. “And they lived happily-ever-after.”

As Christians, we know that God will bring everything to completion according to His will. There will be a happily ever after.

But God’s way is much deeper. In the lives of many people there is tragedy and loss and judgement before the ever after. In the same way, many of the passages in the gospels at first glance lend themselves to a happily ever after ending. But the gospels are more complicated than that. There are larger stories.

==\_==\_==\_==

When people get to catch a glimpse of who Jesus is, the gospels applaud them, they are examples for us. Many people who come to Jesus are forgiven and are healed of infirmities and demon-possession. They leave changed – even evangelizing everyone they meet. We rarely hear about them again, so it is easy to expect that they lived happily ever after.

==\_==\_==\_==

But we are given a glimpse of the larger picture in the Disciples, particularly in the Apostles, and especially in Peter.

That first yes, that first realization, that first conversion experience is not the end of the story.

This week the gospel picks up where we left off last week. Our Lord speaks now of how His mission includes suffering and death – as well as resurrection.

Peter’s initial right answer is now followed by a mistaken conclusion. The insight given him moments before is not imbedded yet. He has much to learn yet.

The story of Peter, and of all those who continue to follow Our Lord, (with the obvious exception of Our Lady), is one of ups and downs. And there are some big downs.

They follow and they do as He tells them. They also abandon and deny and betray Him. They DO make it as saints. But struggle and stumble. They said yes. But they will have to say yes again and again to Jesus after saying no to him time and time again. Their big insight that convinced them to follow Christ was not the end.

When they stumble, they get up (or more appropriately, they allow God to pick them up). Their lives of faithfulness and growth in the Spirit are what gave them the reputation where we can look at their story and see something of God's happily ever after.

==\_==\_==\_==\_==

Peter's declaration last week was not the end of his story. Peter's rebuking Jesus this week is not the end of his story either.

One Scripture Scholar asks us to look at Jesus' response to Peter. Christ may call Peter Satan, the tempter. But He does not tell Peter to go away. He tells Peter to get behind Him.

Why behind? Because a disciple is one who follows. In trying to correct Our Lord, Peter stopped following. And in doing so he got it wrong. He needed to be taught more. If there is anyone worth following, it is Christ. He was telling Peter to take his rightful place, and keep following the Lord of Life and Love.

And of course, Christ's correction and teaching – which still went against the grain for Peter and for us – is the Cross. Redemptive Suffering – Suffering as part of the job of the Disciple – crucifixion as the doorway to Resurrection – is daily something we need to be converted to. Cross with Resurrection is what we can only do by following Christ.

Our happily ever after no doubt includes stumbling and correction. If we follow Christ and keep our hope in God's plan, the ever-after we cannot see now will indeed be happily joined with God's happily ever after.