

## 2020 21<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY

In Our Lord's day, Caesarea Philippi was a Roman fortress township- sited a few kilometres to the South of the border between Israel and Lebanon. Because it was a Roman garrison, ordinary Jewish people would, in the main, have avoided it. Knowing this, Jesus probably went there seeking privacy for a time of reassessment and reflection with the Apostles.

Caesarea Philippi was built at the base of a huge granite cliff. The rock face which looms over Caesarea Philippi is pocked with numerous little alcoves. In the time of Our Lord each alcove would have been home for the statue of a pagan god or goddess. It must have been a spectacular sight to behold. An American scholar once said that the statues would have been as garish and as opulent-looking as film stars at an Oscar ceremony!

Maybe the apostles were playing a guessing game trying to identify which statue was which. This may well have prompted Jesus to ask His apostles: "Who do people say that *I* am?" The apostles proceeded to come up with some pretty random answers but the one they all agreed on was that Jesus was a prophet akin to John the Baptist or Elijah."

But these answers did not get to the heart of just who Jesus was. So, Jesus probed them deeper: "But what of you? Who do *you* say I am?"

There probably would have been a moment of profound silence. It was a big question and none of the Apostles wanted to get on the wrong side of the Master by getting such a personal question wrong.

And then, wonderfully, the Holy Spirit came to rest on Simon Peter, prompting him to say: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." It was a moment of great insight because Peter was proclaiming, for the first time, his belief that Jesus was the Messiah-the One for Whom Israel had been waiting since the time of King David.

While Jesus had been respected as a prophet, up until this stage there had been no serious thought that He was the Messiah. It was a true turning point. Jesus then acknowledged the fact that Simon Peter's answer had been inspired by God: "You are a happy man, Simon. Because it was my Father in heaven Who has revealed this to you."

Today's Gospel challenges us in many ways.

We, like the apostles, are surrounded by pagan gods- greed for wealth and luxury , the yearning of so many for power over others, resulting in toxic cultures at so many workplaces, pornography and the deification of the body contrasted with the denigration of life in the womb- I could go on endlessly.

Jesus stands before the rock filled with pagan gods- which are in total opposition to them- and says to the apostles and to each one of us: “Who do you say I am?”

For a Christian there can be only one answer: “Jesus, You are our Lord and our God.”

But we know that, good as this answer is, it is not enough. So many people, while accepting the reality of Jesus’ divinity, have totally distorted images of Him; just as the apostles had a totally distorted image of what it would mean for Jesus to be the Messiah.

Jesus would tell them that in the next few days they would be heading to Jerusalem where, in obedience to the Will of the Father, Jesus would proclaim His authority as Messiah. There would be a violent reaction from Jewish and Roman leaders bringing about His death on the Cross.

As far as the apostles were concerned Messiahs don’t die on Crosses. Jesus had to be wrong in this. And an ever-so painful process began bringing about a total shattering of the apostles’ image of the mission of the Messiah.

But what is our image of Jesus? How does suffering affect our image of God? How do we cope with the devastation being caused to so many by the Corona Virus? How do we cope with the death of loved ones?

We must continually pray that we may see Jesus as Jesus actually is. We must be prepared to surrender any false images we may have of Him.

On the Cross Jesus’ true identity became clear to the Roman Centurion: “Truly this man was God’s Son!” On the Cross we find the answer for “Who is Jesus?”

Who is Jesus for us? Sweep aside all false gods. Open our hearts to Who Jesus is for us- Jesus Who died for us on the Cross. Jesus, our Saviour. Jesus, our Redeemer. Jesus, the Son of God, Who loves us with a love which is infinite and eternal.

As Christians we open our hearts in love to a Divine Person, Jesus our Saviour- a Person we cannot live without. To Him be glory forever!