

Bulletin Reflection 2021.09.12. Year B1. Week 24. Ordinary Time.

“Who do you say I am?”

“Who do you say I am?” If your answer to Jesus was “John the Baptist, or Elijah, or one of the prophets,” you’d be in for a shock, because you’d have no idea how Jesus would end up being crucified. But what if you, like St. Peter, would reply, “You are the Christ”? Well, you’d be even more horrified and scandalised, since the death of God is infinitely weightier than the death of a prophet.

So was there any practical advantage in knowing the truth over being blissfully ignorant? For one, I suppose the apostles could at least prepare themselves. Not that this seemed to make much difference as they still denied and abandoned the Master during the pivotal moments in his Passion and Death. However, even as they were utterly grief-stricken and downcast, they could acknowledge that everything was unfolding exactly as Jesus prophesied. He did indeed ‘suffer grievously’, was ‘rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes’, and was ‘put to death’. And they were told this beforehand, because only they knew the true identity of Jesus as the Christ. Hence even as this improbable tragedy (especially considering this was the Son of God) was happening right before their eyes, they at least knew it was not by accident but by God’s design. While they couldn’t help but be devastated, there was no reason to doubt Jesus’ prophecy which had accurately predicted these events. So perhaps their greatest advantage was the final detail of his prophecy – that he would rise again after three days. Accordingly, if the Master’s words were true, even as they were suffering the most excruciating sadness at his death, there would still be room for hope.

Returning to the initial question, for those who saw Jesus as a mere prophet, not even the greatest prophets had ever conquered death. But what if this same man was in fact the Son of God? If Jesus was indeed the Saviour and “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6) was there any reason to doubt his words, even as they found it almost impossible to accept or comprehend? Likewise, the same can be said about what faith offers us. If our Master is anything less than the Son of God, we have every reason to despair, because there is no guarantee that our death would eventually lead to a resurrection of the body. On the contrary, in echoing the faith of Peter – ‘You are the Christ’ – we recognise that our earthly life’s end is not just to be dreaded and avoided, but to be embraced and loved for the sake of genuine Christian love. For if Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, we can willingly ‘renounce ourselves, take up our cross and follow him’ knowing he is our only hope for eternal life.