

Who do the crowds say that I am?



Who is Jesus? This question has been asked for centuries and is addressed in the Gospel today. Though there have been many responses, it is still pertinent. Jesus asked his disciples: *But who do you say that I am?*

Like the disciples, I would perhaps have preferred to respond to a more general and easier question. Jesus asked: *Who do the crowds say that I am?* He meant: *Who do people think I am?* The disciples could respond and share their theoretical knowledge without having to commit ourselves. But when the question was phrased: *You, yes you - who do you think I am?* It became an entirely personal issue.

Peter had the courage to step up and respond to Christ's words: *You are the messiah, the Son of God!* But Christ did not act like any other messiah. He warned them often that he would suffer. If we had been present, what would we have said? What would we say today?

Our response would probably resemble something like this: Jesus was an extraordinary man who lived a long time ago in Palestine. He spoke to us about God. He revealed that he was God's Son and taught us that God is our Father, that his death on the cross would bring us salvation, that he would rise from the dead on the third day ... Some of us might also add that Jesus is the *Christ*. We could also respond as Peter did. The words *Christ* and *Messiah* define the same reality: *someone who has received a mission, an envoy or messenger*. Depending on your background, you would use the Hebrew term *messiah*, or the Greek term, *Christ*. However what we read most often in the Scriptures is: *a messenger sent from God*, One who extends his hand to us.

We must study the Scriptures to understand the significance of Christ's words. It could be that a simple response, like Peter's, may already have provided us with the answer to the mystery of who Jesus is. This is a very good beginning. As we continue our reflection, we recognize that God's ongoing commitment in our lives was fostered through the ministry of His Son who became one of us. God sent the *Messiah*, the *messenger*, the *Christ*, who is our brother.

Jacques Houle, c.s.v.

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