

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (B) (2021)

A) SURNAMENES

- I have always been interested in what people's names, especially surnames, actually mean
- apparently in the British Isles, surnames fall into four main categories
- there are those that are based on a Christian name, such as Edwards or Thompson or Fitzwilliam or Macdonald
- Another group of surnames is based on localities or places the ancestor came from: Combes, Woods, Marshbanks and so on
- a third group would reflect the occupation of the ancestor: tailor, fletcher, carpenter, or cook or butler
- and the last group are nicknames which describe the ancestor's appearance or temperament: Fairchild, Swift, Goodwin and so on
- in today's Gospel, Jesus is very keen to be given the right title, the right name
- Not because the label is important but because he needs to know if his disciples are even beginning to understand who he really is

A) WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

- So Jesus begins by asking them: WHO DO OTHER PEOPLE SAY THAT I AM?
- Jesus has impressed people by his teaching with authority, his miracles of healing, his challenge to different levels of society, and so people think he is a great prophet
- So they answer: John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the other prophets of the Old Testament, come back to life
- these prophets were all people who foreshadowed or pointed to the expected Messiah
- Then Jesus puts the question to them directly: BUT YOU, WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?
- Peter speaks up for them all: YOU ARE THE CHRIST
- The word Christ is not a surname or a nickname; it is the Greek word for Messiah
- Peter identifies Jesus as the longed-for Messiah
- Jesus does not contradict him, but he gives them strict orders not to tell anyone about him

B) WHAT KIND OF A MESSIAH IS HE?

- if he really is the Messiah, why should he want his disciples to keep quiet about it?
- The traditional understanding of the title Messiah was of a spectacular figure who would gain victory over the enemies of Israel by military might, a conqueror who would never be touched by suffering or defeat
- But that was very different from how Jesus saw his own role

- The secret of his true identity will only be revealed in his passion and cross
- So Jesus had to "TEACH THEM THAT THE SON OF MAN WAS DESTINED TO SUFFER GRIEVOUSLY, TO BE REJECTED BY THE ELDERS AND THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE SCRIBES, AND TO BE PUT TO DEATH".
- All of this is beyond Peter's comprehension; he wants his Messiah to be strong and victorious and invulnerable
- Jesus knows that in himself, God will experience weakness, humiliation, defeat, abandonment and death
- But out of that very disaster will come the ultimate triumph
- Meanwhile, though, he must not be tempted away from the cross
- And so he rebukes Peter: GET BEHIND ME SATAN! BECAUSE THE WAY YOU THINK IS NOT GOD'S WAY BUT MAN'S.

C) THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

- Then Jesus turns to his disciples and to the crowds: to everyone, and he gives them an invitation: to follow him on the road of suffering
- IF ANYONE WANTS TO BE A FOLLOWER OF MINE, LET HIM RENOUNCE HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME.
- IF anyone wants to be a follower of mine: it is an invitation; no-one is compelled.
- But if we take up the invitation to follow him, then denial of self is the first requirement
- Jesus does not invite us to take up his cross
- rather, it is our own cross that we carry, one that is, as it were, made to measure, made to fit our shoulders
- it is an invitation to face up to the unavoidable suffering in our lives
- our own weaknesses and limitations, the weaknesses and limitations of others, the consequences of mistakes, wrong choices, sinfulness, our own and other people's, whatever life throws at us
- and, with his help, to pass through those crosses to all kinds of resurrections, great and small.
- Sometimes a suffering faced and lived through can lead to greater self-knowledge, a growth in personality or a growth in relationships.
- Sometimes we can see that our suffering is given a redemptive value, even though we do not seem to benefit from it directly, because we have united it with that of Christ.
- But to run away from the cross is no answer; we shall be the losers in the long run:
- FOR ANYONE WHO WANTS TO SAVE HIS LIFE WILL LOSE IT: BUT ANYONE WHO LOSES HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE, AND FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL, WILL SAVE IT.