

“You Are the Christ”

Mark 8:27-38

Throughout His ministry, the crowds of people never truly did know who Jesus was. They witnessed His miracles of feeding and healing with the same disbelieving awe as the disciples did when Jesus calmed the storm. “Who is this who has authority over the wind and waves?” That was the disciple’s response to that miracle early in their relationship.

But as the disciples progressed in their relationship with Christ, as they had been with the Lord for about three years at the point we find them in our Gospel reading, in response to the question which the Lord posed to the disciples, “But what about you...Who do you say I am?” Peter was now able to boldly and confidently make his great confession of faith by saying: “You are the Christ.”

What was it that brought Peter from asking the bewildered question: “Who is this who has authority over the wind and the waves?” to the point where he could confidently say: “You are the Christ.” Was it seeing the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 or the feeding of the 4000? Was it that Peter walked on the water with the Lord – until he sank? Was it that Peter witnessed Jesus healing the blind, deaf, or mute? Was it Jesus’ teaching concerning what is clean or unclean?

These are the events that Mark records in his Gospel as occurring between the calming of the storm and Peter's confession of faith. Which of these events opened Peter's eyes to Jesus being the Christ, the Messiah sent from God? You could say none of them, or you could say all of them, depending on your point of view.

There is no one event or one miracle that brought about this great revelation. The true nature of Christ is not revealed merely through His miracles. Many people witnessed the Lord's miracles and yet remained mired in their unbelief.

We could say that the understanding of Jesus being the Christ sent by God was the result of witnessing the miracles; however, this needs to be understood in the proper context. The miracles only point toward Jesus being the Christ because they are a part of the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The Psalmist wrote: "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing [Ps. 145:15-16]. And Jesus feeds the people 4000 or 5000 at a time.

And when Isaiah foretold the coming of the Christ, he said of that time: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy [Is. 35:5-6].

It was not merely the miracles that brought about this change of understanding in Peter and the other disciples. It was the power and authority of God's Word being revealed through Christ's fulfillment of the

Old Testament. Every aspect of Christ's life was to further enlighten the people in their understanding of the salvation God had promised since man's Fall into sin. The miracles did not reveal Jesus as the Christ. The miracles confirmed what God's Word in the Old Testament had always revealed about the Messiah who was to come.

This is why Jesus warned His disciples not to tell anyone who He was. Through their eyes being opened to God's Word, they had come to this understanding that Jesus was the Christ (they still did not understand what it was that the Christ was sent to do, as is clearly demonstrated in Peter's rebuke of Jesus). However, not just the disciples, but the rest of the people also needed to learn of Christ through the Word of God, not through the word of some fishermen from Galilee and their stories of miracles and healing. It is on the power and authority of God's Word that faith is created and real and lasting change happens.

Which is why we worship the way we do. We proclaim the Word of God. We have the Word made flesh, Christ's Body and Blood offered to us through the miracle of the Sacrament of the Altar. We have forgiveness for our sins, life, and salvation promised to us each time we hear that Word and partake of that Sacrament.

The crowds of people who sought out Jesus in the hope of being entertained by a miracle, or the crowd of 5000 who wanted to make Jesus their king because He could feed them with five loaves and two fish [Jn. 6:15], these people would most likely be disappointed by what goes on within these walls, because this is not a place of entertainment or

showmanship. Within these walls is found the greatest miracle of all: the Word of God cleansing the hearts of repentant sinners.

It was a miracle that brought Peter to his understanding of who Jesus was. It was the miracle of faith. You may not have walked on the water with Jesus, and you may not have witnessed the healing of the blind, deaf, or mute, but you have seen miracles. As God's baptized child, you have witnessed a miracle in your life. Faith is a miracle, because it brings a gift of healing from God that surpasses all human understanding, as St. Paul says [Php. 4:7]. It brings mercy to you, and you deserve no mercy. We confess each week that what we deserve for our sin is both temporal and eternal death. This miracle of faith has brought life to you – eternal life, life to the full. We, who were once dead in our sins, have the miracle of life in Christ.

Because this gift surpasses all human understanding, it is not astonishing that, regarding that which concerns God, even men and women of outstanding talent and intellect are completely blind. Faith is not an intellectual exercise. It is not astonishing that there is spiritual blindness in the world. What is astonishing is that God has opened the eyes of so many undeserving people like you and me. The miracle is that you and I have heard the Word of God, and we can join Peter and say in faith and confidence to our Lord: "You are the Christ!" Amen.