

September 16, 2018 – 24th Sunday, Ordinary Time
“But who do YOU say that I am?” Mark 8:29”

The question Jesus has for us today is: Who do you say that I am? And so, what is your answer? (I have to ask the same question of myself.) If we answer like Peter, “You are the Christ (“God’s anointed), then how do we follow the anointed day by day. Do we say we believe and live like we believe OR NOT?

Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, said that the temptation for us is to seek cheap grace. He understood cheap grace as a practice of Christianity that desires religion’s benefits without the cross. He called it the graced we bestow on ourselves in a religion that makes no demands and changes nothing, all the while expecting a heavenly reward simply for calling oneself a Christian.

Today’s scripture offers a powerful antidote to such cheap grace. Isaiah’s suffering servant provides an image that the early church attributed to Jesus. The servant takes up suffering by facing it like **flint** – a rock. He will not be deterred, even by death, from proclaiming God’s word.

Among the horrors of the Nazi regime during WWII was a plan to euthanize all mentally and physically challenged children and adults throughout Germany and its occupied territory. The Catholic bishop of Muenster in the Rhineland would have none of it. Bishop Clemens August von Galen exhorted the people of the region to take into their homes or find hiding places in their barns for all the exceptional children and adults being cared for by Church-related schools and institutions – and then dared the government to find them.

His sermon, preached in the cathedral on July 20, 1941, said this: *At this moment we are the anvil rather than the hammer. Other men, strangers, renegades, are hammering us...Ask the blacksmith and hear what he says. The object which is forged on the anvil receives its form not alone from the hammer but also from the anvil. The anvil cannot and need not strike back; it must only be firm, only be hard. However hard the hammer strikes, the anvil stands firmly and silently in place and will long continue to shape the objects forged upon it. If it is sufficiently tough and firm and hard, the anvil will last longer than the hammer. The anvil represents those who are unjustly imprisoned, those who are driven out and banished for no fault of their own.*

James meant to shock his community when he said, “Faith...if it does not have works, is dead. James is writing to a community who found death repulsive and ritually contaminating. All today’s talk about the sexual abuse scandals – the deceit, cover up, and lack of concern for the victims is repulsive. But this cannot divert our attention from the demands of faith. Our worship today is a mockery if it does not lead us to justice...whatever the cost.

I had the privilege of living with Bishop Cosgrove when I served at St. Regis in East St. Louis. Three things impressed me about his lifestyle. 1. Prayer; 2. Humility; 3. Concern for the poor. In his sermons/homilies he often repeated a prayer he said every day when he looked in the mirror: “Don’t let me get in your way today, Lord.”

With Peter, we are to not block the Christ, but we are to live the good news that is the Christ. It is a matter of life and death. We can only do that by humbly listening to God each day in prayer, reflecting on God’s word, and doing our best to live it by acting with justice and integrity. God is good, all the time. Let us try to be the same.