

HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

MARCH 13, 2022

JOHN 1: 43-51

“WHO DO YOU THINK JESUS IS?”

It is extremely important for us to have a clear understanding of who Jesus Christ is---but that doesn't always happen. A very extreme case of that happened about 500 years ago.

In the 1500's the Spanish Conquistadors, led by Cortez, were moving through newly discovered Mexico, conquering it piece by piece. There were Catholic priests traveling with the army to convert the natives to Christianity. After Cortez took over a town, the army would usually stay there a while and the priests would use that time to do as much catechism as they could and then they would baptize all the inhabitants before they and the army moved on.

At one town, however, Cortez was in a big hurry to leave. They were only there a couple of days....so the priests did a bit of very rushed catechism and then baptized all the people. Meanwhile, Cortez's favorite and beloved horse had taken ill and had to stay behind...so as the army left, Cortez had all the villagers gathered and made a speech to them, saying---“We have to leave quicker than I expected. But I plan to be back in a few months. While I am gone two commands I want you to follow: Number one---please take very good care of my beloved horse and nurse it back to health; Number two---now that you are baptized be sure to worship Jesus every day.”

Cortez and his army did return a few months later. All the native folks gathered to meet him. And Cortez was surprised to see his horse, now apparently healthy, standing before him in fancy robes with a crown on its head. The Mexicans told Cortez---“We have obeyed your two commands: we have taken good care of your horse named Jesus. And we worship your holy horse Jesus every day.” Well, they had gotten things a little mixed up! (The Reformation, Owen Chadwick, Penguin, 1975, p. 320)

It really is important we are clear on who Jesus really is! The most important question for each of us to ask and answer is---“Who is Jesus Christ?”

We get the clear answer in today's gospel reading from John 1. In this chapter the Lord is beginning to choose His 12 Disciples. One of them he

calls to follow Him is Nathanael. And right in the middle of our gospel reading, Nathanael comes to faith in Christ. And Nathanael gives a firm and correct answer to that most important question by saying to Jesus in verse 49—“Rabbi, you are very Son of God.”

That is the correct answer-----Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the eternal Second Person of the All-Holy Trinity come to our world in the flesh. He is both fully God and fully man at the same time, come to save us.

Do you believe that? Deep down, in your heart, in your innermost being: what do you believe about Him? Who do you think He is?

Lent is a good time to think through what we believe about Jesus Christ. It's possible to be attending and active in church for years and years and never have really totally thought this question through. If that's your situation, this is the time to think it through. For certainly not everyone thinks the same thing about our Lord!

Back in 2014, a woman named Kelly Steihaus decided on her own to do a simple survey on the campus of Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Nothing sponsored by anyone, nothing fancy, no trying to convince anyone of anything---just walking around campus and asking students one simple question and writing down their answers. The question was “What do you think about Jesus?” The answers varied quite a bit. She received some traditional Christian answers. Some other students' answers were: “Cool guy”; “a prophet”; “a good man who helped people”; “he taught good things”. There were not any sharply negative answers, but certainly lots of skeptical answers such as----“He was good, but not a savior.”....”He was a good man, but certainly not the only way to God.” Lots of variety! (“Our Daily Bread”, 7/1/14)

If Kelly Steihaus asked you, “What do you think about Jesus?”, what would you say?

If you're not sure, Lent is a great time to think that question through and come to some clarity. If that's your situation I want to give you 3 pieces of advice on seeking clarity to that all-important question-----

One---Read the Gospel of St. John during Lent. It's 21 chapters long, not a huge book. If you aim at reading one chapter per day and miss a lot of times, you can still easily get it done before Pascha. Read it slowly and carefully. Questions as you read? Call, email, text, talk to me at coffeetime. Nothing better that I like than if someone says to me, “Father, can I ask you a question about chapter 12 of John?” Reading a gospel, getting to know more about Christ, is a very good way of clarifying what we think about Him.

Two---Take a few minutes each day to intensely pray to Jesus Christ asking

Him to guide you in what you believe. Ask Him to reveal the truth to you. If your doubts run deep and you're not sure He's even alive 2000 years later, perhaps pray this----"Jesus, I'm not even sure you exist. But, if you do, guide me to the truth."

Three---Ask for information and guidance from me, the deacons, or laypeople that have a great knowledge of the Bible and our Faith. Don't handle doubts and inner questions by silence and hiding them. Don't think priests get shocked when people tell them of their doubts and struggles. (Remember, we priests hear lots of confession---we're long past getting shocked by anything!) Priests and deacons have had their own experiences of having gone through doubt and struggle---they won't tell you off, they will help you figure it out. *You can't get answers if you don't ask questions.*

In today's gospel reading from John 1, Nathanael (as he becomes a disciple) clearly says who He believes Jesus is---"Rabbi, You are the very Son of God!". The big question for each of us is---"What do *I* believe about this man Jesus?"

Not sure? Don't panic. Now, Lent, is the ideal time to figure it out! The ideal time is now to get clear in your heart and mind---what do I believe about Jesus Christ? May He, who is the way, the truth, and the life, guide you into all truth.