

# THE EMMAUS SERIES

## 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday Year B

Isaiah 50:5-9

James 2:14-18

Mark 8:27-35

### *Who do you say I am?*

Today's reading from Mark is the climax to which his presentation of the life of Jesus to this point has been leading. The mission of Jesus has been rejected and misunderstood. It is essential to God's designs that the disciples of Jesus do not misunderstand the mission that has brought the Son forth from the Father to bring healing to a lost world.

The 'who' question is central to our human existence: 'Who are you, my companion on the journey of life?' 'Who am I?' These questions, if we face their implications, confront us with the depths and mystery of our common humanity. Jesus called himself, 'the Son of Man', a title that affirmed his sharing in our human condition. When the 'who' question is addressed to him we find not only the mysterious depths of our common humanity, but also the mystery of the generous designs of God, conceived with the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the depths of the divine eternity. Discipleship is learning, in the course of our lives, the answer to the 'who' question we address to the Saviour - who has made himself our ever-present companion. Like Peter, we shall find that we are forced to re-evaluate our most basic assumptions in the light of the ways of God we learn from Jesus.

Jesus is 'the Christ', the messiah in whom Israel's hopes are centred. He begins to teach his disciples 'quite openly' what lay ahead of them in Jerusalem. He is not the political saviour so ardently hoped for in popular expectations: the 'Son of Man' will be 'rejected' – 'put to death' even. Peter's brave act of faith must be further clarified. Mark's gospel does not spare Peter – perhaps because this community has already heard of Peter's humiliations from Peter himself. Jesus addresses Peter as 'Satan', obstructing God's plan. That plan, Jesus explains, has been foreshadowed in two themes of Israel's hopes, the 'Suffering Servant' (see Is 52-53 etc – the first reading is one of the descriptions of the 'Servant') and the 'Son of Man' (Dan 7). Both of these themes envisage a mysterious personage who will fulfil the destiny of Israel – the first bringing healing for the world's self-inflicted suffering by sharing in that suffering himself; the other bringing all peoples together under the beneficent reign of God's ways.

Jesus emphatically spells out the demands of discipleship: sharing in his responsibility for the human family, even if it means sharing his 'cross'; living 'for the sake of the gospel', the Good News of the generous future God has in store for struggling humanity.

Once again, the reading from James speaks in very practical terms. His discussion of 'faith', that is 'quite dead' if it has no 'good works' to show, is familiar. It is possible that James is responding to a self-serving misinterpretation of Paul's teaching that 'we are justified by faith'. True discipleship, as Jesus reminds Peter, proves itself in a generosity that has been learned in the presence of the Crucified Saviour.

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