

YOU WILL HAVE TO LOSE YOUR LIFE TO SAVE IT
24th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – 12 SEPTEMBER 2021



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Mark's gospel hits a turning point in this gospel reading. The pace suddenly quickens and the disciples are left to ponder their relationship with Jesus? They hear disturbing words out of Jesus' own mouth.

GOSPEL OF MARK 8:27-35

Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi.

*Along the way he asked his disciples, **"Who do people say that I am?"***

They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets."

*And he asked them, **"But who do you say that I am?"***

Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Christ."

Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him.

He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days.

He spoke this openly.

Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples,

*rebuked Peter and said, **"Get behind me, Satan.***

You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them,

"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

The setting is in the north of the country near Caesarea Philippi where Herod the Great had built a temple to honour Caesar. Philip had inherited the complex and improved it. In such a place where a man is worshipped as a god, Jesus asked the question that needed an answer. 'Who do you say I am?' The first section of the gospel asks the question, 'who is Jesus'? Ironically the demons know who he is but no one else. Will the question be answered?

Now he asks the question in this place of pagan gods and Peter answers, "You are the Christ' meaning' the anointed one of God'. The Jewish people had a different understanding of who the Messiah would be and what he would do. Peter was disappointed or dismayed to hear that Jesus referred to himself as one who would suffer and die and rise again. It is clear that this is not what Peter and the other disciples want to hear.

Peter takes Jesus aside and remonstrates with him. Jesus seeing the disciples watching this disagreement blasts Peter. Nowhere else does Jesus refer to another person as satanic. But it reminds us of the temptations in Matthew's gospel where Jesus commands the tempter to leave him as the tempter tries to bribe him. The tempter and Peter have temporal power on their minds.

Peter doesn't understand what is going on nor do the other disciples. Later they will come to understand what Jesus was doing – the Father's will. If he was going to suffer it must have been immediately obvious that they were being warned about their own destiny, they will suffer if they remain with him.

Peter and the disciples have heard the paradox – if you want to save your life, then you will have to lose it. If you lose your life for 'my sake and the sake of the gospel', you will save it.

The question arises then as it does today: is it worth it? Why would anyone do this? Why would you follow a preacher and teacher like Jesus who appears to have no power or organisation behind him? The early Christians were listening to the stories, taking in the implications of following Jesus.

They did come forward and accepted the gospel and the living presence of God in their lives though the dangers of becoming Christian were very real then and becoming so today in some countries. The presence of Jesus in their midst through baptism and the eucharist was a promise of a remarkable life with him lived in the Christian community.

Trouble comes but God knows each of us by name.

Father Gary Walker SSC

[St Columbans Mission Society](#)

Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/091221.cfm>