

HOMILY SUNDAY 12 – C* (Homily 02)

“Who Do You Say I Am?”

(Zechariah 12:10-11; Psalm 63; Galatians 3:26-29; Luke 9:18-24)

The question that Jesus asks of his apostles, and of us, in today’s Gospel, is a critical question. It has to do not only with his identity, but ours. Who we are in relationship with Jesus depends on who we hold Jesus to be. If he is simply a historical figure, the Jesus of history only, then we can relate to him in an academic fashion, knowing all kinds of facts about him that won’t impact on our lives very much at all.

If, on the other hand, we believe his message that he is Son of God, the Word made flesh, the creator of the universe, the love and compassion of God at work among us, the Savior of the world, the forgiveness of God in person, the second person of the Holy Trinity who wants to dwell in us and invites us into an intimate relationship with him, then that changes everything. It changes us.

The question that arises, then, is how can we come to this kind of a relationship with this mysterious God of ours who works in such humble ways? As a fellow believer in Jesus, I don’t have all the answers, and want to lean on the advice of a dear friend who is much more adept at spirituality and theology than I am and I want him to provide the main content of this homily. Allow me to introduce him to you:

I first got to know this person as a family friend growing up in the rural district of Highgate, Saskatchewan. I was impressed by his honesty as a youth, his hard work on the family farm, his obedience to his parents and his generosity in caring for others.

We attended the University of Saskatchewan together in Saskatoon. He was very involved in student affairs, and co-chaired a social-cultural club which organized activities for foreign-born students. One of their activities was to bring the international singing group *Up With People* to Saskatoon where they performed in the Civic Center.

He needed to support himself as a university student, so he invited me to join him in a business venture involving home photography. At the start-up meeting with the staff he humbly introduced himself only as the

photographer, even though he was the owner and manager. I was impressed by his freedom from any need to display power or control.

At one point, he taught me the importance of having a philosophy of life by asking me what my philosophy of life was. I really had not thought of that seriously up to that point, so his question put me on the spot and forced me to think about that neglected area of my personal growth.

We later traveled together with the singing group *Up With People*. One night, billeted together with a family in Toledo, Ohio, he taught me to pray spontaneously. As we were falling asleep in the dark, he asked me to help him pray and proceeded to pray a heart-felt prayer of gratitude that he made up as he prayed, something I had never done before. I remember my chagrin as I could only muster up a quiet *Hail Mary* and *Our Father*.

Later, sharing a hotel room in Brussels, he inspired me to get myself a bible and read scripture. I would get up in the morning and do my exercises while he sat in bed reading. When I asked him what he was reading, he told me that he read from scripture every morning. That has become something that I do everyday since then.

We eventually both joined the Oblates and there, like a spiritual director, he heard my life's story, the first time I had shared that with anyone. He suggested I pray with Isaiah 43:1-7, a passage that speaks of God loving me just for who I am and not for any accomplishments, something I needed to hear after years of trying to earn my father's love. He also pointed out that I needed to work on my relationship with my father, something I only understood and acted on years later.

We also both got involved with Marriage Encounter as team priests and did five ME weekends together, first as an odd-couple, then at team enrichment sessions. That was the beginning of our practice of dialoguing and sharing everything, helping us achieve intimacy as two friends in the Lord.

He is also able to show affection in appropriate ways. I remember walking down the corridor of the Star of the North Retreat House in St. Albert at a Christopher Leadership seminar when he put his arm around my shoulders and said, "Sylvain, I've come to love you very much."

Eventually, he left the priesthood, got married and had a family. Whenever I visited his family, he would shut off the television and we would have some warm family fellowship which always made me feel valued and special.

He also stood by me during times of personal struggle and crisis, twice coming to visit me in the States when I was doing a renewal program there.

He was a great advocate of team ministry, and enjoyed giving especially the Christopher Leadership course and catechetical programs as a team. I have enjoyed collaborating with him in giving First Nations retreats and First Nations lay ministry formation sessions. He also loved to play, and when he was around we always learned new board or card games.

After all these years, though we have gone separate ways, we still have a committed relationship, and whenever we meet, we catch up on the time we were apart, then we share around the medicine wheel (Physical, Mentally, Emotionally, Relationally to God, others, self and creation, as well as our human sexuality) as a way of experiencing the new life in Christ that we want to experience.

He is a warm, caring, compassionate, faithful person. As you can see, he is certainly qualified to speak on the theme of this homily. I consider him my best friend, and I hope you also will consider him your best friend after you read what he has to say. I am delighted to introduce you to my best friend (who is also my Creator, Higher Power, my God). His name is Jesus Christ.

(Note to the reader: Those who are giving homilies or reflections are invited to use your own experiences of persons who have been Christ for you over the years, and to make this homily your own.)