

Some of you may have heard of Franciscan Sister Jose Hobday, a Native American member of the Sisters of Saint Francis of Assisi, whose motherhouse is located in St. Francis, WI. For many years, she was a very popular speaker on spirituality; she was a writer and story teller; she died a little more than a year ago. In one of her talks several years ago, she told a little vignette about St. Teresa of Avila – the 16th century nun and mystic. (Mystics are people who sometimes have conversations with God.) One day, Teresa was sitting in her cell speaking with Jesus. Jesus asked, “Teresa, who are you?” Teresa responded with her religious name: “I am Teresa of Jesus.” Then, as only intimate friends can do, Teresa turned the question around, and asked: “Jesus, who are you?” Jesus replied, “I am Jesus of Teresa.”

In today’s gospel, Jesus has a similar conversation with his closest disciples. He asks them the question “Who do you say I am?” It’s a question intended not only for the apostles, but also for us; and a question that each of us has an answer for, whether we’ve ever thought about it or not. I’d like to invite and challenge everyone to think about how you would respond to that question if Jesus were standing in front of you right now. “Who do you say that I am?” What would you say in response?

It’s a question that requires a daily decision and a daily response, a daily recommitment to Christ and a daily willingness to be identified as his disciple. It’s a question that is intimately connected to the second part of today’s gospel, where Jesus predicts his

passion, death and resurrection, and where Jesus gives two challenges to his apostles and to all of us – challenges which are absolutely essential to be a disciple of Jesus.

The first challenge is this: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross *daily* and follow me.” Only Luke inserts the word “daily” in this statement of Jesus. In doing this, he clearly precludes martyrdom, which would be a one-time thing. But he also says that acceptance of the cross, which is integral to discipleship, is not a *seasonal* or *part-time* thing, but a way of life: to be a disciple of Christ means to take up the cross each day. What it means to take up the cross daily Jesus explains in the second challenge.

And the second challenge is this: “whoever wishes to *save* his life will *lose* it.” This is the paradox of the Christian commitment. Because we are one with Christ, we are called to lose ourselves in the service of others. Any time we do anything which serves the real needs of others, we are losing ourselves. This is visible every time parents care for a disabled child, or when Alzheimer’s disease strikes a couple. It is visible in the loving attention that health-care workers give to victims of debilitating diseases. It is visible in prophetic and sometimes dangerous stances taken against violence and injustice. It is taking the side of truth and justice in a world that has many ethnic and religious divisions, in a world where social ills continue to grow, where women continue to suffer injustice and violence in many spheres of life.

The discipleship to which Jesus summons his followers is directly counter to the values that shape so much of our world. Whatever we do to serve the good and the needs of others: this is losing ourselves.

Discipleship is prompted by the question “Who do you say that I am?” . . . So, who is Jesus for you? Is Jesus your spouse, your child, your parent, your friend? Is Jesus your fellow-worker, your boss, your client? How do you lose yourself for them each day?

Is there any difference between Teresa of Jesus, and Jesus of Teresa?