

**Who Do You Say I Am?**  
**Good Friday 2006**

Reverend Fathers,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

*When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"*

This simple passage, found in the Gospel of St. Matthew, was said in Caesaria Philippi (25 miles north of Galilee), where Jesus and the disciples were gathered. The people of the time had their guesses on who Jesus was. Some said He was John the Baptist. Others guessed He was Elijah or one of the Prophets. The disciples of Christ probably found all these guesses quite amusing. So, when Jesus asked them, "Who do **you** say I am?" the disciples probably began contemplating: "Who is He? Is He the One? Or, are we hoping in an empty dream?"

This question was not one exclusively to the disciples. Jesus asked many people, not the least of who were the Pharisees, the teachers of the Law, who decided **not** to answer for fear of the people. Yet, in their hearts, they had serious doubts. He was someone different, to be sure; yet, **Who was He?**

Today, Good Friday, we have all gathered together at our Churches to mourn the death of Christ, to glorify His Saving Passion, to thank Him for His love. For some, this visit is simply a "yearly custom" of coming to Church on the appointed day. For others, it is a time of remembrance and contemplation. For others, it is a time of spiritual cultivation, a time to examine our lives, to ask forgiveness from Him who is crucified for our sakes. All of us, however, ask that short – yet difficult – question: **Who do we say He is?**

Throughout history, Jesus has been portrayed in so many lights. Early Christian heresies portrayed Him as a "spirit", a "ghost", even a "non-human God" or a "non-divine human". Some see Him as a good teacher, even as a "good magician" or "soothsayer." Today, we even

find some portraying Him in “Da Vinci Code” ways, listening to a novel’s rendition rather than text we (as Christians) call Divinely inspired. So: **Who is He?**

Other faiths and cultures see Him as a prophet, a wise rabbi, a deranged lunatic, a fraud. Some portray Him as a philosopher, a seeker of social justice, or a “nice guy who could even make mistakes.” Yet, *is that who He is?*

When Jesus asked that question at Caesaria Phillipi, St. Peter (one of His disciples) spoke up: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” From the previously-heard answers, this is quite a different approach.

He is not *just* a simple man. He is not *just* a wise teacher. He is **definitely not** a “ghost or spirit”. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

His Name, *Jesus*, literally means “the One who is Victorious, the One who saves.” His title, the Christ, means “the Anointed One”. As the “New Adam”, He did right what Adam failed to do: He was obedient to the Will of God. He is the Messiah, the Savior; yet, He is the Suffering Servant – who suffers for humanity. As the uncontainable and limitless God, He was contained and limited in the womb of a woman! As the Being who does not feel thirst, hunger, pain and exhaustion, He subjected Himself to these things. As Perfect God and Perfect Man, He had a personal relationship with His Creation, whom He saved from the tyranny of the devil.

The Crucified Lord, as we see Him today in front of us, hanging **for us**, is One that suffered the Extreme and Ultimate Humility and Humiliation. Not only did He humble Himself to be born as one of His creation, but He was *killed* by that creation in the most inhumane way. Crucifixion was death by asphyxiation – you died because you couldn’t breathe anymore... not the way the Son of God should be treated.

It is, as we call it “The Extreme Humility” (Η Άκρα Ταπείνωσις). Did He have to do this? No. Did He want to? Yes. And Why? Because He loves us. He showed us this Perfect Love, in the fact that He, the Sinless One, died so brutally for a sin-filled creation. This icon of selfless love,

of sacrifice, of Glory, is one that our Lord emulates today. He is a God of Glory even on the Cross, because (with His suffering and death), He brings Life – a new Life – to all of creation. Good Friday would be a defeat if not for the Sunday of Pascha. With Pascha, Good Friday is the end of the Old Creation, filled with the effects of sin and corruption and the beginning of a New Creation, filled with life, forgiveness and a new and more intimate relationship with God.

Yet, we *still* ask in our lives, **Who is He?** We associate Him with feastdays, red eggs, icons, and rituals. We connect Him with books and literature. We see Him only on the surface, and not for who He *really* is: The King of Glory. The Christ.

Pilate asked Christ, “What is Truth?” even though he started Truth in the face. While we ask every day the questions of “what is Truth? What is love? What is life?” we can make up our self-serving answers to suit our needs, or confess the Truth: Christ is the Answer.

This Good Friday, we came here to our Church for our own reasons. When we leave, my brothers and sisters in Christ, we have a choice: we can face our Lord with the face of a casual onlooker, coming to “venerate” and leave, awaiting next year’s “Good Friday”, **or**, we can “change our mind” on who Christ is. We can come to this Cross, with tears of repentance and thank Him for bringing us from death to life, from the earth to Heaven. We can put our false perceptions of Him to the side, not listening to anything that makes out Christ to be a simple Man or “the first of all creation”, but to give Him – the God-Man who died for us all – the glory and respect and honor that He deserves: To make Him the Lord and Savior of our lives.

We can keep our old relationship with Him, or we can pledge a new relationship, one where we will vow to get to know Him in a whole new way.

The choice is ours.