

Our Lord asks his Apostles: "Who do people say that I am?" and He gets several different answers: John the Baptist ... Many people ... including Herod Antipas ... probably out of guilt ... believed and even feared that Jesus was John ... returned from the dead. Others thought that He might be Elijah ... whom they believe had not really died ... and whose return was to herald the coming in triumph of the Messiah ... who would then throw down the yoke of the Roman oppressor and free the Jews. Still others believed He might be one of the other prophets ... such as Jeremiah, whom they believed had hidden the Ark of the Covenant and would come back and restore it to its rightful place in the temple.

Jesus listens patiently and then asks of those who know Him best: "But who do you say that I am?" Peter ... the spokesman ... nails it! "***You are the Christ.***" But then ... Jesus goes on to warn them not to tell anyone! Why? Peter is right ... as far as he goes. Jesus is the Christ ... the Messiah ... the anointed one! Why not spread the word? ... Jesus did not want this fact known because the people had a very erroneous notion of what being the Messiah meant and His *mission* ... did not involve fulfilling their expectations ... their expectations of earthly glory ... of His becoming the new David to slay the Roman Goliath! He was not ready to reveal ... nor were the people ready to hear all the all the implications ... of His *being* the Christ.

Even as He began to reveal to those closest to Him ... what it truly meant ... that He was not a *David* ... but the suffering *servant* of Isaiah ... that He must suffer ... that He must be rejected ... that He must ultimately be killed ... even *they* ... rebelled against the idea. Peter was even presumptuous enough to *rebuke* His Lord ... exasperating Jesus ... prompting the command: "***Get behind me Satan***" ... pretty strong stuff!

He *had* to get their attention because ... as hard as it was to hear what was going to happen to *Him* ... as if that wasn't enough ... He had much more to tell 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 ... ". He is telling them that not only being ... the *Messiah* involves suffering ... but even *following* the Messiah involves suffering.

And ... He's not just telling **them** ... He's also telling **us** that we too ... if we wish to follow Him ... must take up **our** cross.

Oh ... we certainly don't have to go looking for crosses! Plenty of them are provided by this thing called ... **life!** There are crosses of family life, crosses of loss, crosses of loneliness, betrayal, poverty, illness, abuse, disappointment and many, **many** others. Being a Christian means carrying **all** these crosses that life lays on us with the forbearance of Isaiah's suffering servant and the **faith** that Christ will help us as Simon of Cyrene would help Him. And although it might seem like these crosses would be enough of a burden for anybody ... even more is asked of those who would follow Jesus.

He is telling us that we must not just believe in Him ... not just accept what He teaches with our minds ... but that we must also **deny** ourselves! St. James elaborates asking: what good is faith without works? Such faith he says, bluntly, is **dead!** If we truly believe that **God** is love, then we must **bring** this love to others, to walk the **same** path of service, suffering and self-giving love that Jesus walked. This is not an **easy** path but it, too, is a cross that Jesus' followers **must** carry.

And finally ... in our world today ... more and more ... faith **itself** ... is a cross that the Christian must carry! C.S. Lewis wrote that ... prior to writing the *Chronicles of Narnia* ... he was quite **comfortable** ... in his atheism. He didn't **want** God to exist. He tried to **escape** belief in God. But after years of friendship ... and patient, gentle, loving evangelism ... by Christian friends ... most notably J.R.R. Tolkien of middle earth fame... the moment finally arrived. He would describe himself ... kneeling in his room ... as "the most **dejected** and reluctant convert in all England." And Lewis knew he could not just be a "**closet**" Christian! That was not who he was! He **had** to go to church ... to "fly one's flag", as it were ... as an Oxford professor ... surrounded by **unbelievers** ... this was **not** easy! But **he** took up his cross!

And if **we** ...think "not as God does, but as human beings do ..." as the world does ... **none** of this will **ever** make any sense! But Jesus says more! After His rejection ... His betrayal ... His suffering ... after His death ... He **would** rise! And He makes the **same** promise to His faithful followers ... to us ... for **suffering** will be conquered by joy, **death** will be conquered by life and crucifixion ... will be conquered by resurrection.