

THEOLOGICAL FORMULATIONS AND LIFE

IMPLICATIONS

by Dcn. Tom McConnell

24TH Sunday OT

Year B

Is 50:5-9; Ps 116:1-6,8-9; Jas 2:14-18; Mk 8:27-35

The story is told of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson on a camping trip. As they lay sleeping one night, Holmes woke Watson and said, "*Watson, look up into the sky and tell me what you see.*" Watson said, "*I see millions of stars.*" Holmes asked, "*And what does that tell you?*" Watson replied, "*Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Theologically, it tells me that God is great and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, it tells me that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. And what does it tell you, Holmes?*" Holmes answered, "*Someone has stolen our tent.*" Some people are great at speculative knowledge, but when it comes to its implication for practical living, they score zero, like Watson. Such is Peter in today's Gospel.

Scholars tell us that the passage we have for today's Gospel is the central passage in Mark's Gospel. The first half of the Gospel leads up to this passage, and the second half of the passage flows from it. The beginning of the Gospel up to this point, has been a preparation for the revelation of the

secret of Jesus' identity as the Messiah...and in this passage the Messianic secret is revealed...and from here to the end of the Gospel deals with the fulfilment of Jesus' mission as the Messiah. What we have in this passage is Jesus examining his disciples to see whether they have gotten the point. The examination is in two parts: a doctrinal-theological part and a practical-existential part.

The first part focuses on the question: "*Who do you say that I am?*" (Mark 8:29a) But in typical theological fashion, they have to summarize what others have said on the issue before giving their own views. Peter, spokesperson for the apostles, gives the pointed and correct answer: "*You are the Messiah.*" (verse 29b) The importance of this moment of disclosure is brought out more in the Gospel of Matthew, rather than Mark, where Jesus congratulates Peter, assuring him that this knowledge is a direct revelation from God. Then he rewards Peter, whose name until then was Simon, by giving him the name Peter, meaning Rock; and promises that upon this rock, He...Christ, would build His church, and that the

powers of hell would not prevail against this church. That is the end of the first half of the examination, the theoretical, theological, doctrinal part; and Peter emerges with flying colors.

The second half of the examination has to do with the practical, existential implications of the conclusion they reached in the first part. Quoting from verse 31: "*Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*" At this point Peter disagrees vehemently with Jesus. Even though he scored 100% in the doctrinal part of the exam, he shows by his actions that, in fact, he knows nothing of the practical implications of what he had just said. So, Jesus gives him a thumbs-down. "*Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*"(verse 33)

The Rock, who came out with flying colors in the doctrinal section of the exam, ends up as the Satan in the practical section, which is really the determining section.

This must have been a big shock for Peter, and it should for us too. For we are very much like Peter, paying too much attention to doctrinal correctness and too little attention to practical life correctness. Look how we prepare people for membership in the church. We teach them all the correct doctrines and examine them to see whether they have learned the correct answers, whether they can recite the correct creed. We ask them or their God Parents, "*Do you believe in this and that doctrine?*", and they say "*I do.*" Then we baptize them. But have we devised a way of examining them on how they are following up the implications of these doctrines in their day-to-day lives? No. That seems not to matter too much to us...but it matters very much to Jesus.

In the parable of the Last Judgment, Jesus reveals that we are judged more by how we have practiced the faith, than by how we have believed. Of course, both are important, but practical life has the priority. Let's ask God today to make us solid as the rock in our profession of the true faith, but even

**more so in our practical commitment to the demands of the
faith in our daily lives.**

God bless you all!!