

Thursday, February 15 (Luke 9:18–25)

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Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.” He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?”

This is a crucial moment in Jesus’ life. He asks the question which lies at the heart of Christian faith and theology: ‘Who do you say I am?’ Peter becomes the spokesperson for this little contingent of believers. Only later will they grasp how the term Messiah is understood by Jesus. Suffering, rejection and death await him, but then glory.

Note that Jesus prays before important moments in his ministry, as when he chose his twelve apostles. Was he consoled by the fact that, unlike Herod, the disciples recognize that he is the Messiah? Perhaps he had been wondering if he had failed to make himself known for who he was. But what will the disciples now make of his Passion?

In my prayer, I imagine Jesus asking me, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ What do I say? Do I believe that this mysterious Messiah of God will be with me even if, like him, I have to suffer greatly, and that in his own good time he will raise me up?

Prayer. Lord, to follow you I too must embark on a personal discovery of who you are. Give me the grace to walk this faith-journey. May I not keep you at arm’s length by putting a protective shield around myself, but help me rather to daily embrace you on the path of discipleship, with its pains and joys. Amen.

