

TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (8/23-24/2008)

Isaiah 22/19-23, Psalm 138, Romans 11/33-36, Matthew 16/13-20

Tell me please, where has the summer gone?

Why don't the months of January, February and March go by as fast?

I ask myself these questions every year – and I always get the same answer. Nada!

But the summer has been good, and it's high time to settle down into a more serious schedule.

That seriousness is reinforced by the gravity of today's Scripture readings.

Jesus seeks some feedback from his disciples.

He perhaps figures that the people are not in awe of the disciples and so are more open with them in discussing their feelings about Jesus.

So Jesus asks: "*Who do the people say that the Son of Man is?*"

Note the title Jesus uses of himself – not "Son of God" which is our title for him – but "Son of Man", a phrase from the *Book of Daniel* (7/13).

The "son of man" in *Daniel* is not capitalized; rather it stands for one who is human, though sent by the Lord.

Jesus has not yet revealed his full identity, but what are people picking up?

They see him as a holy man, indeed a prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah; some even see him as John the Baptist returned on the scene.

Jesus accepts that information, but immediately presses the issue with those around him.

"*Who do you say that I am?*" is his next question to the Twelve.

This is the key moment in the scenario near Caesarea Philippi.

In a way, the disciples have been "freeloading" with Jesus to this point.

Although Jesus has been teaching them what discipleship is all about as they move through Galilee, they have not had to sign on the dotted line and commit themselves, as it were.

Peter bravely speaks and acts for the others: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!”*

It’s as if the entire meaning of the Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament) comes down to that moment.

The simple fisherman, Peter, articulates what the Jewish people have been hoping for and awaiting since God first made His promise centuries before.

Peter’s bold declaration of faith in Jesus as Son of God and Messiah is unprecedented.

It moves Jesus to lavishly praise his impetuous friend, and to “promote” the fisherman to the most responsible position of all, leader of the believing community forming around Jesus.

At this point, we all should ask ourselves what we believe about Jesus.

He is a human being, just like us, yet he is also divine, unlike us.

The combination of human and divine is total mystery and beggars our understanding.

Yet we proclaim our allegiance to this God made Man.

I saw an interesting painted sign on the back of a semi-truck on Interstate 80 recently.

It caught my attention: **“Jesus is the Lord, not a swear word!”**

There are lots of opinions bandied about concerning Jesus’ relationship to us.

Who is he to you?