

**Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B
(Sept. 16, 2012)**

Jesus My Friend

Did you ever take time to ask yourself, “Who is Jesus for me?” I think that’s what we are being challenged to do today. And it’s a challenge that’s meant for all of us: moms and dads, little children and big children. And everybody else! Who is Jesus for you? Right here and now!

In the Gospel Jesus asks the disciples what they heard people saying about him. The answers are varied. People think many things about him. But they all point in one direction, which is that Jesus is a prophet, someone who speaks to God on our behalf, and who speaks to us on God’s behalf. Then Jesus asks them, “But you, who do you say that I am?” and Peter answers for them all, “You are the Messiah, you are the one who has come to save us.”

Today I propose that we think seriously about that question, because it’s really posed to all of us. Can you imagine Jesus standing or sitting in front of you, looking you in the eye and asking, “What do you think of me? Who am I for you?”

The Gospels tell us many things about Jesus. He is a prophet as the people said; Jesus is a teacher. Someone who speaks our tongue to tell us secrets about God, tell us the way to truth and life. Jesus is human and divine, at once unique son of God and son of Mary. Jesus is Savior, the one mediator between humanity and our Creator, who came to save us from sin, from self, and from Satan. Last week we heard that Jesus is a healer as he cured the deaf man with a speech impediment. Indeed more than anything Jesus seems to be a healer. He is someone with a large heart that goes out to people who are suffering in any way, he makes the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the mute talk and sing. Maybe we can say that above all Jesus is a lover. It’s because he loves so much that he does all these things and never seems to grow tired of doing them.

So who is Jesus for you? Well you can take your pick or you can say he is all of these. But I would like to add one more to that list. Did you ever think of Jesus as a friend? That’s my favorite way of thinking of him. Jesus

wants to be our friend and he is our friend. How do I know? Because he said so. Remember after the Last Supper how he told his disciples, "I no longer call you servants. I call you friends." And he says the same to us. Like any good friend he enjoys our company. He wants to be with us and he is with us all the time. He never grows tired of listening to us and we can say anything we want to him and he will understand. In spite of what we might have thought he never grows angry with us even if we do something wrong or say something bad. He doesn't want us to do or say things like that, and if we could hear him, like a good friend he would admonish us as he did Peter in the Gospel story, but he didn't stop loving Peter even though his words were very strong. Just as he never stops loving us no matter what we say or do.

There is an old hymn that you don't usually hear in Catholic churches, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" that says pretty much what I've been saying. It speaks profound truths simply which is probably the best way to speak them:

Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness, take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer.
In his arms he'll take and shield thee; thou wilt find a solace there.

These are good thoughts for all of us today as we hear Jesus say to us, "Who do you say I am?" and then we do our best to answer.