

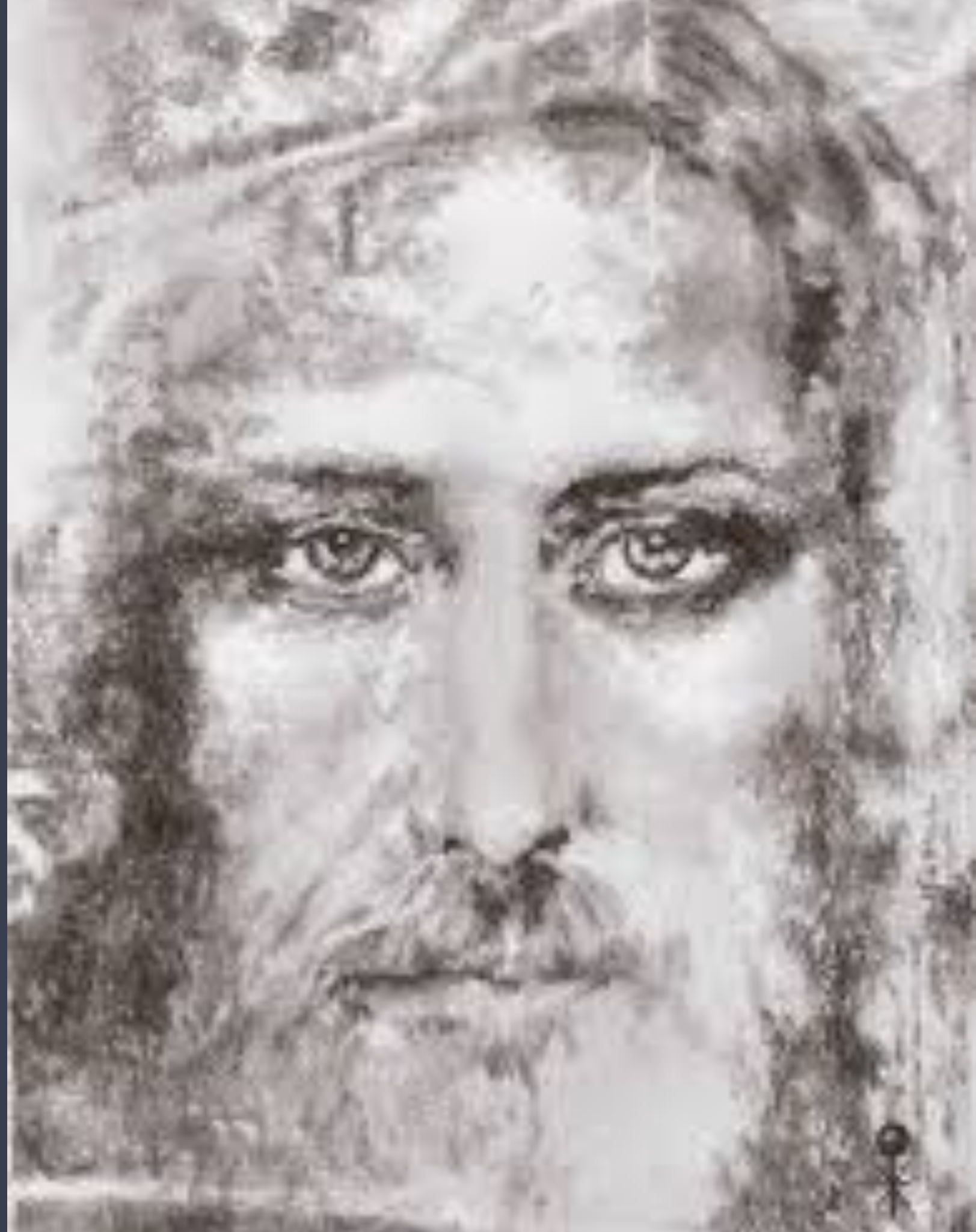
# WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

**“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”** Jesus addressed the same question to each of us. **“Who do you say that I am?”** This is a personal question that demands a personal response. It is a personal question that demands a personal response. It is a critical question that calls us to commit ourselves one way or other? It is a decisive moment when our answer will determine our entire destiny.

Here are some of the ‘classic’ answers

- **My personal Lord and Saviour**
- **The Son of God**
- **God Incarnate**
- **He is my life, the song I sing, my everything**
- **My big brother**
- **My best friend**
- **My Rock**
- **My Comforter**
- **My Teacher**
- **My Co-pilot next to me**

The list can go on ...and on...



# The answer is never really academic or abstract. It always has a context:

## MY LORD AND MY GOD

- Who do we say Jesus is in the wake of Global Pandemic of Covid-19?
- Who do we say Jesus is when there are homeless people without a home, people going to bed hungry? Or when you are kicked out of your family or when you don't have a good relationship with your siblings or torn apart by separation or divorce?
- Who do we say Jesus is when a loved one dies, the doctor gives news we did not want to hear, or our life seems to be falling apart? We lose our jobs
- Who do we say Jesus is when we are faced with decisions that have no easy answers, when the night is dark and the storms of life overwhelm us?



At some point we have all probably been told who Jesus is. Maybe you heard it from priests, teachers, parents, friends, or prayer groups. Maybe you read it in books, Catechism lessons, RCIA classes. Maybe you saw it on Facebook, read it on the internet, or heard it in a song. Some of the answers may have been helpful. Some were not. By now most of you know that I don't intend to answer that question for you. I can't. Each of us must answer for ourselves. It is not, however, a theology or Bible exam. If anything it is an examination of our own lives, our image of God, from young till now. I don't think Jesus is asking us to just parrot back the answers we've heard or read. Maybe that's why he pushes the disciples to move from what they are hearing around them – John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets – to what they are hearing within themselves. "But who do you say that I am?" This is not an easy question. I wonder if we sometimes too readily accept and settle for "Sunday Homily Jesus" answers. You know, the easy, feel good, sentimental ones. The problem is life isn't always easy, feel good, or sentimental. It's one thing to say who Jesus is listening to this homily in the safety and comfort of your home. It's very difficult to say who Jesus is outside of that, or who Jesus really is for you personally.

Using the context of these few examples what does it mean to say Jesus is my personal Lord and Saviour, my brother and friend? What does it mean to say Jesus is my life, the song I sing, or my teacher? Here's my point. Who we say Jesus is has everything to do with who and how we are and will be. In some ways our answer says as much or more about us than Jesus. It reveals how we live and what we stand up for. It guides our decisions, and determines the actions we take and the words we speak. It describes the expectations and demands we place on Jesus. It discloses the depth of our motivation for and commitment to following Him, a motivation and commitment that will be challenged and we are invited to take up our cross and follow Jesus. Jesus' question isn't so much about getting the right answer as it is about witnessing and testifying to God's life, love, and presence in our lives and the world. It is less about our intellect and more about our heart. It is grounded in love more than understanding.

It moves us from simply knowing about Jesus to knowing him. In some sense there is no once and for all, finally and forever, answer. We are always living the question, the mystery. **Who Jesus was when I was a child is different from who He was when I was in my 20s or who He is for me today when we are 30's 40's 60's 80's** It's not that Jesus has changed. We have. We are constantly engaging in this question and in so doing we not only discover Jesus anew we discover ourselves anew. God never changes. Sometimes we discover a disconnect between the "Sunday Jesus" about whom we sing and talk for an hour, and the life we live the other 168 hours of our week. Our words and actions don't align, don't match what we profess on Sundays.

There is no congruity or integrity. It is not a judgment about anyone but in acknowledgement of just how difficult it can be to recognize and live the truth that Jesus is **"the Messiah, the Son of the living God."** To **BELIEVE that He is ALIVE, LIVING!** There are gaps between our "Sunday Jesus" and the circumstances of our life and world. Sometimes my answers were too simple, too small, too easy. No match for the complexities of life and the pain of the world. Other times our life has not reflected what we said about who Jesus is. Sometimes we kept quiet when we should have spoken up. Other times we were passive when we should have done something. Whenever we fallen into that gap it has usually been because we were trying to play safe, stand on neutral ground. That almost never works. Compromising can get us into trouble when the "rubber hits the road." There is nothing safe about the question Jesus poses.





How could there be? There is nothing safe about Jesus or the life to which we call us. Living radically, calls for risk taking. Jesus' life and presence among us call into question everything about our lives, our world, the status quo, and business as usual. That's why we ought not to answer His question too quickly, too glibly, or with too much certainty. It's not a question to be figured out as much as it is a question to be lived. To reflect deeply and not mince our words. Who do you say that I am? What do people think of me? Or perhaps move to another big step and ask yourself: **Who am I?**

**A true story from a medical doctor.** A catholic doctor in a big city hospital makes time to attend Mass every day. When people told him how impressed they were, he said he was not always so faithful. It was a patient who made him look at his life. The doctor would do rounds every day examining his patients. As he entered one of his patient's room, the patient looked intimidated and apprehensive. The patient seemed to look right through him and stared at him. The patient shot the doctor with a question: "Who are you?" The doctor first thought that perhaps it was the medication that made the patient drowsy and did not recognise him as the doctor. The doctor started to say, "*well as you know, I am a doctor*", and then he just stopped cold. It was hard for him to describe or sort out what went on in his head. All kinds of answers went through his mind which all seemed true and yet somehow less than true. Yes, he was this, but he was also that, but that is not the whole picture. The doctor's confusion must have shown because the patient gave him a grin and closed his eyes. The doctor asked, "*Is there anything I can do for you?*" The patient said no, I am tired. He died a few hours later. The catholic doctor, could not get the patient out of his mind – "who are you? For years he had trained as a medical doctor and got lost in his profession. He realised that the patient had taken away his degree, tossed it back to him and said – but who are you....beyond the degree? The story does the same for us.



**Who are you beyond the facade, the front that you put up? Who are you beyond your job title, degree or trade?** Who are you beyond all the externals? Who do people say that I am, is the question that Jesus asks in today's Gospel? How we answer that question says a lot about us. There is danger that people fall into and that is we try to make Jesus in our image and likeness and we humans often do this. Catholics have tried to make Jesus Catholic and Protestants have tried to make him Protestant. Many of us have been guilty in one way or another, trying to fit Christ in our own image. We want Him to be like us. We want Jesus to be the kind of Saviour that we want. Sometimes we fail to realize that we do not call Jesus, it is He who calls us to follow Him. Yes, Jesus has called each one of us, not only Priests and religious. It was His cross that was signed on our foreheads and because of our Baptism we are disciples of Christ. **The question that we all ask ourselves is – are we living as disciples of Jesus?** Christ is here with us. But today He comes quietly, subtly, gently, invisibly and wherever we are, look for Him. He is in the consecrated Host at communion, in the Monstrance. Gaze on Him at home in the faces of our dear ones, in the suffering poor. In the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and the naked, the sick and the imprisoned and those afflicted with Covid-19.



## TRANSFORMING GRACE

GOD is the **STILLNESS** that caresses me

GOD is the **WIND** that lifts me up

GOD is the **BIRDSONG** in my ears

GOD is the **BREATH** that refreshes me

GOD is the **GARMENT** that clothes me

Because GOD is in me and with me

I become the **WILL** to love Him

I become the **BEAUTY** He loves

I become the **MELODY** of the song

I become the **ECHO** of the stillness

I become His **IMAGE**

God in me and I in Him

(By Veronica Nathan)

I invite you to think about this wherever you go, where you work, where you play and pray and where you live. If anyone is looking for Christ, will they find Him in you or do they have to look for another? Shortly after his conversion, St. Augustine penned these immortal words: "Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things that you created. You were with me, but I was not with you." Augustine, sincere, restless, had been searching for love and for God. Eventually he found them in the most unexpected of all places, inside of himself. God and love had been inside of him all along, but he had hadn't been inside of himself. There's a lesson here: We don't pray to make God present to us. God is already present, always present everywhere.

**The secret to prayer is not to try to make God present, but to make ourselves present to God.** Sadly, this is also true for our presence to the richness of our lives. Too often we are not present to the beauty, love and grace within the ordinary moment of our lives. Because we are restless, tired, distracted, angry, obsessed, wounded, always in a haste, too often we do not enter into our hearts, inside our ourselves and appreciate the treasure within. We think of our lives as dull, small-time, not worth putting our full hearts into, but as with prayers – our lives come laden with richness. I would like to quote Rainer Marie Rilke, a poet: "If your life seems poor to you, then tell yourself that you are not enough to see and call forth its riches. There are no uninteresting places, no lives that aren't full ... What makes for a rich life is not so much what is contained within each moment, since all moments contain what's timeless, but sensitive insight and presence to that moment."

The secret to prayer is not to try to make God present, but to make ourselves present to God. The secret to finding beauty and love in life is basically the same. Like God, they are already present. The trick is to make ourselves present to them. Like the young Augustine, we are away from ourselves, strangers to our own experience, seeking outside of ourselves something that is already inside of us. The trick is to come home. God and the moment don't have to be searched out and found. They're already here. We need to be here. The Great Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner was once asked whether he believed in miracles. His answer: "I don't believe in them, I rely on them to get through each day!" Indeed, miracles are always present within our lives. Are we awakened to the moments?

*"Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift of God, which is why we call it the present."*

– Bill Keane

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