

## **Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 23, 2026**

Brothers and sisters, we get an overabundance of opinion polls especially around election times as we head into midterms here. In the Gospel we have an example of an early opinion poll surprisingly concerning the vital question, namely, what is the identity of Jesus? “Who do people say the Son of Man is? ‘And this is the central question in the Gospel today. It is also a central question for you and me to answer in our lives. We might not be aware that our life depends on how we answer this very question. If we answer this incorrectly, we will get everything wrong. As Aquinas says, “An error in the beginning is an error indeed, it holds all the way through.” Today, it is fashionable to regard Christ as just one of the great religious founders, regarded merely as a great teacher, a holy man, or a prophet. And how one answers this question forms how one listens to Jesus and one’s willingness to follow him.

Jesus knew who he was, and the question was put forward for the benefit of his disciples to help the disciples to clarify their thinking, and Jesus didn't just take this out of thin air. Some people said that Christ was John the Baptist. Others said that he was Elijah, still others say that he was Jeremiah or one of the prophets. In our times, people will say he is like Buddha, or Confucius, or some other teacher. While flattering, these answers were only approximations to the mysteries of Jesus. Our Lord rejected these inadequate definitions of others and encouraged his disciples to speak for themselves.

So, he said to them, “Who do you say that I am?” There was silence, and then Peter answered, “You are the Christ. That is the Messiah,

the Son of the living God.” Jesus wants us to answer this question for ourselves. Not merely a textbook answer, like we know Peter’s reply. But truly for ourselves. And we answer it not just by our words but through how we live. The mystery of who Jesus Christ is was only gradually revealed to the apostles. In fact, they totally didn’t get hold of it until after the resurrection. Importantly, Peter’s answer didn’t end the question once and for all. Holy Mother Church has been defending the various heresies that either denied the humanity or the divinity of Jesus. And these had to be settled by the ones who received authority to teach and make disciples of all nations, the apostles and their successors, united in orderly succession, was settled in the Church through her councils. You know, we got our Creed in Nicene which we recite here each Sunday at Mass or on solemnities. As we recite it here at every Sunday Mass or solemnity, two-thirds of it relates to what we believe, what the Church believes about Jesus Christ.

The Creed is a development of that kernel of faith professed by Peter, which we hear about today, and each of us are in faith, any very question posed by Jesus. “Who do you say that I am”, and it is essential that we make Peter’s answers our own, to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, not simply because the Church says so, but also out of our personal conviction. It is crucial that we make the Creed our own profession of faith, not just words we recite at Mass. The more people we have in the Church who believe out of personal conviction, the more the Church will be standing on the rock of Christ with a firm foundation of faith. Even though it is important to be able to profess the truth, it is only the beginning, it is nothing without action. Words without action are

empty. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are all shaped by our convictions. Archbishop Fulton Sheen observed. *“And if we do not live as we think, we soon begin to think as we live. In short, either we will change how we live to match what we believe, or we will change what we believe to match how we live.”* Many problems people have with the teachings of the Church start not with a problem, but with the way that are living. And the attitudes are made less by the way one thinks, and more, by the way they live, following Christ's commands or not.

The question Jesus asked is not only the question of the Gospel, again, it asks of us today and every day, *“Who do you say that I am?”* Who do we say that he is by our actions? Do we love God with our whole heart, all our mind, all our soul, and do we love our neighbors. Who do we say Christ is, or how would our actions demonstrate what we actually believe?

Today, as we stand to profess the Creed at this Mass, let us not simply recite the familiar words on page fourteen of the hymn book - let's make them our own. Let us work to make them our own. They are a profession of faith, even more than words upon our lips. May it be a conviction and heart, and a guide for our daily lives. Let us conclude with this prayer, “Lord, grant that the faith we profess today with our lips, that we may believe within our hearts and practice within our lives. Amen.”