

Who are we? For example, if I started chanting, “*We are...*” many of you might loudly and proudly respond, “*Penn State!*” While others might scoff at that or respond in protest saying, “Father, not everyone in Pennsylvania is a Penn State fan!” Don’t worry I get it, but I *am* a little biased considering my two older brothers went to Penn State. Or if I started chanting, “*E-A-G-L-E-S...*” many of you might loudly and proudly respond “Eagles!” While others might scoff again and be like, “Alright Father, just stop. You’re 0-2.” It’s this time of year when many Americans take great pride in being identified as football fans of a particular team, whether it’s college football or the NFL. For many football fans, the notion of identity is huge.

Well in today’s Liturgy of the Word, particularly in the Gospel and the Second Reading, the notion of identity takes center stage. Our Lord Jesus asks His Apostles two serious questions regarding His identity. The first question Jesus poses to them is like a Divinely-commissioned public opinion poll: “Who do people say that I am?” And we *shouldn’t misinterpret* this question—like Jesus isn’t some “hyper-sensitive, self-conscious slave to public opinion.” Okay, He’s not some power-hungry

politician who's constantly pandering and looking for votes. Jesus isn't asking His Apostles daily like, "Okay guys, what's my approval rating at today? That's not who Jesus is, thank God!

Rather, the whole point of Jesus asking this question to His Apostles is that He's emphasizing the fundamental importance of His personal identity! Jesus asks the Apostles this question because He ultimately wants to elicit their own faith in His Divine identity as the Messiah. And so Jesus poses the second, more significant question to His Apostles asking, "But who do *you* say that I am?" In asking this second question to the 12, Jesus demonstrates that He cares *more* about what His Apostles think of His identity than the crowds, who in many cases just follow Jesus because they're interested in His miraculous powers, not His message or true identity.

"But who do *you* say that I am?" This simple, yet powerful question from Christ is one that is placed before every human heart that encounters Jesus. Ultimately, brothers and sisters, each of us is personally invited by our Lord to answer this fundamental question and how we answer it, will undoubtedly affect our lives forever. St. Peter

answered this question with great faith and boldness, proclaiming “*You are the Christ.*” Little did St. Peter know how this answer would dramatically change his life forever.

Yet such an answer should *also* change *our lives* forever. In fact, our own Catholic faith in Christ, in His Divine identity as the Son of God, should transform *our own lives* in such a way, that when others encounter us, they should be able to identify us as disciples of Jesus. One could modify Jesus’ question to the Apostles in today’s Gospel and direct it toward us in 2018: “Who do people say that we are?” And I don’t pose this question to imply that we should be insecure, self-conscious slaves to public opinion—we shouldn’t be. Rather, this question can be posed to us within the context of our identity.

In the second reading today from the Letter of St. James the Apostle, the Lord defines our identity as His disciples by the necessary unity of faith *and* works. In other words, disciples of Jesus can be identified, *not by faith alone*, but rather by a *living faith* that is practically manifested through a life of love and virtue, through words *and* actions. As St. James the Apostle says so clearly, “What good is it,

my brothers and sisters, if someone *says* he has faith but does not have *works*? Can that faith save him(?)...So also *faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*” In other words, what’s the whole point of having faith in Christ, of being Catholic, if we’re not actually going to live our Catholic faith with every fiber of our being? What’s the point of even coming to mass on Sundays if we have absolutely *no intention* of *living* our Catholic faith *in its entirety* on a daily basis? These are serious questions that demand serious answers.

The whole point of St. James’ letter is that our fundamental identity as Catholics, as disciples of Christ, should be rooted in a *living faith* that is *expressed through works*, through daily acts of virtue, love, kindness, chastity, compassion, mercy, and justice. The Letter of St. James is rooted entirely in the explicit teaching of our Lord Jesus, who tells us in the Gospel of John, “I give you a new commandment: *love one another*. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. *This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” Notice that Jesus *never* says, “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have *faith alone* in Me.” He *never* says

that! Nor does Jesus ever say, “It doesn’t matter what you believe, just be nice to people.” #ThingsJesusNeverSaid. Brothers and sisters, our Catholic *faith* in Christ should determine *how we live*—and *how we live and love* will identify us as Jesus’ disciples. Hopefully by the way we courageously and lovingly live our Catholic faith through our *words* and *actions*, others can confidently identify us, declaring, “*they are disciples of Jesus Christ—they are Catholic.*”

Given everything that’s been happening in the Church, we might be tempted to cower in fear and refuse to share publicly with others that we’re Catholic or we might even be afraid to publicly live or defend our Catholic faith in Christ. But brothers and sisters, I would argue that *now’s not the time to cower in fear and refrain from loudly and proudly embracing our Catholic faith in Christ!* Now’s *precisely the time* to *live* our Catholic faith in Christ *in its entirety* with great courage and boldness! *Now’s precisely the time* to live our Catholic faith in Christ with contagious joy, love, and hope!

Obviously right now, given the clerical sex abuse scandals, many people hold some intensely negative views about Christ’s Church, and I

personally understand such views. Yet, it's *precisely my Catholic faith*, grounded in the natural moral law, that impels me to forcefully condemn and fight the barbaric evil of child sexual abuse, whether it's inside or outside the Church! It's my Catholic faith that drives me to help ensure that these evil crimes never happen again! Brothers and sisters, let's live our Catholic faith in all of its beautiful fullness, and in doing that, let's show others what it *truly means to be Catholic*! By how we love and serve others, let's show people who and what the Catholic Church *really is*—let's show them who *we* are!

So brothers and sisters, “who are we?” At the end of the day, can we say with confidence that when others encounter us, they're able to identify us as faithful disciples of Christ—as Catholics? As we prepare to worship and receive our Lord Jesus Christ Himself in the Most Holy Eucharist, let's ask our Lord to sanctify our lives so that we may truly have a living faith manifested by our love that will enable others to identify us declaring, “They are disciples of Jesus Christ—they are Catholic.”