**The Marist Way of Connecting Faith with Mental Health – Part 4**

## He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

*(Mt. 16: 13-17)*

I want to pick up where I left off, referring to when our students and all of us, amid our suffering, hang on to the faith sometimes by the skin of our teeth and hold on for dear life. Of course, we may ask, "Faith in what?" The question that should be asked is, "Faith in whom?" Faith involves accepting certain beliefs or truths, such as those we profess when we recite the Nicene Creed at Mass. Before we get there, another question must be asked first. Jesus poses that question to his disciples and, in turn, to every generation of believers.

> "When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi* he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ***He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"*** Simon Peter said in reply, ***"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*** Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father." (Mt. 16: 13-17)

Jesus was aware that there was considerable talk about his identity. "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." There is plenty of talk about Jesus' identity today. Some deny he ever existed or claim he rose from the dead. Some deny that he is the long-awaited Messiah or his claim to be divine. Others see him as a teacher, guru, or healer – a good man, but one among many others.

There is similar confusion about God. Some deny the existence of God or describe god as a force of energy that permeates the universe. Others return to a form of paganism, believing there are many gods related to the earth, etc. Others worship at the altar of power, greed, social status (pride), etc. Sadly, many people today are turning to worshiping the devil, who is not known for having our best interests at heart.

All of this is to say that the most consequential question we must answer in life is not who to marry, what college to apply to, what to major in, where to live, etc. Those and others are important questions for sure. However, the one with eternal consequences that will impact how the other questions will be answered is the one posed by Jesus, 'Who do you say that I am?"

Peter's recognition that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God is why Jesus will say to those enduring hardship and, in our case, mental and emotional struggles, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me" (John 14:27).

When Jesus speaks about having faith in him, he is not talking about propositions to be believed. He is talking about trusting him, meaning everything he has revealed about our heavenly Father is trustworthy. That applies to trusting everything he has revealed about himself, that he is human and divine, the long-awaited Messiah, who has come to save us from our sins and be crucified, die and rise on the third day, and who will come again in power and glory.

For that reason, we want our students to leave Marist with a dynamic relationship with Jesus and be able to call him, who is their Savior and Lord, their friend. That recognition of Jesus' identity allows us to trust him. Jesus is God, and God does not lie.

Trusting Jesus does not mean our students will be spared doubts, questions, or suffering. "Whoever does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:27)[1] There would be no

[1] I like this explanation of Luke 14:27 found in the Amplified Bible. "Whoever does not carry his own cross [expressing a willingness to endure whatever may come] and follow after me [believing in me, conforming to my example in living and, if need be, suffering or perhaps dying because of faith in me] cannot be my disciple."

need to trust if everything went our way. Experiencing mental and emotional issues will be a cross some students may have to carry. There are other crosses students will carry. Jesus promises to help them get through them if he remains in them and they in him. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. And the rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock." (Mt. 7:24-25)

When life feels particularly harsh and meaningless, and faith in Jesus begins to weaken, we want our students to pray for increased faith. What does that mean? Fr. Mike Schmitz, a popular author, speaker, podcaster, and Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries in the Diocese of Duluth, MN, has a particular name for this faith. He calls it courageous or heroic faith.[2] Believing that our suffering has meaning even when it feels meaningless requires courageous faith. Believing that Jesus loves us when our pain and anguish seem to never end requires heroic faith. Believing that Jesus will get us through whatever crisis we are undergoing requires courageous faith. Believing that Jesus is with us when we feel he is absent requires heroic faith. That is what we are asking for when we pray for an increase in faith. Sometimes, that prayer can be summarized with one word: help! That will do.

The sacraments, the Eucharist, the Bible, vestments, music, bishops, clergy, laity, courses in theology, stained glass windows, the lives of the saints, service, Catholic schools, hospitals, church buildings, and outreach to the poor have as their purpose to entrust ourselves to Jesus. We can do that because we believe he is who he says he is. We can do that because we think he is our Lord and Savior, who wants to call us friends for some inexplicable reason. Our relationship with him, mediated through the church, his mystical body on earth, empowers us to press on in troubled times when we would otherwise give up. We do this because it is the gift of the "theological virtue of hope that enables us to long for the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (CCC#1817).

Using Marist language, we want our students to think, judge, feel, and act toward Jesus the same way Mary thinks, judges, feels, and acts toward her son.

For this grace for our students and ourselves, we pray, "Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our sweetness and our hope."

Amen.

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[2] Schmitz, Michael Fr., How to Have Faith in Jesus (Even When It's Hard), https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?q=fr.+michael+schmita+courageous+faith&mid=23881B9037195DFB547823881B9037195DFB5478&FORM=VIRE.