

## **Homily -- 14th Sunday OT; B-cycle**

From my poetry and literature days in college, I remember this story written by Nathaniel Hawthorn. In a pleasant, sunny valley in New Hampshire, surrounded by lofty mountains, lived a boy named Earnest. On the side of one of the mountains, in a bold relief, nature had carved the features of a gigantic face.

From the steps of his cottage Earnest used to stare intently at the stone face, for his mother told him that one day a man would come to the valley whose features would look just like the great stone face, and his coming would bring joy and happiness to the community.

“Mother,” he said one day, “I wish it could talk, because it looks so kind, and its voice would be so pleasant. If I were to see a man with such a face, I would surely love him dearly.” So Earnest continued to gaze at the great stone face for hours at a time.

Several times the rumor spread that the long expected benefactor was coming, but each time it proved to be false. In the meantime Earnest had grown to manhood, doing good where ever he could. The people in the village loved him, and everyone was his friend. And as he became an old man, Earnest still stared at the great stone face, waiting for the day of his arrival.

One day a poet came to the valley. He had heard the prophecy about the great stone face, and in the evening, as the sun was setting, he saw Earnest talking to some people. As the last rays of light flooded the massive outlines on the distant mountainside, they fell on Earnest’s face. The poet cried out, “Look! Look! Earnest is the likeness of the great stone face!” All the people looked, and sure enough, they all saw exactly what the poet saw. By looking daily at the great stone face, Earnest had become just like it.

*“Who is this man, that he says such things?”*

This is the question that is asked of Jesus, all throughout the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and Saint Mark, that we just heard today.

These three gospels continually ask that question; who is this man?

Who is this Jesus of Nazareth?

All three of those of those gospels reach their climactic moment when Jesus asks the same question to his apostles; *“Who do the people say that I am? ... But you, who do you say that I am?”*

And this is necessary, and this is important, because this is the question all of us today are confronted with in our everyday lives.

Who is he? Who do *we* say that he is?

And how we answer that question determines how we act and interact with others out in the world.

There are some that believe that Jesus was a magician, a wonder worker.

He was this weird guy with strange powers to do miracles, but he wasn't God. King Herod believed this.

When they arrest Jesus and send him to Herod, Herod gets all excited because he thinks that Jesus is going perform a miracle. Dazzle me. Preform for me. Some Catholics today have that very same attitude toward Jesus.

Why can't Mass be fun? I get so bored at Mass.

Why can't we have different music?

Why can't we have the children dance around the altar?

Because we are not here to be entertained! We are not here to be dazzled!

We are here to be fed.

We are here to be fed by our Lord and God by hearing his sacred Word in scripture, and by being nourished with his body and blood from the altar.

That is why we're here. We are here to become an image of him.

Some people believe that Jesus was just a prophet, and not God. Islam teaches this.

The New Age movement, the Jehovah witnesses, and a variety of cults teach this. Buddha was a great prophet, Moses was a great prophet, Mohammed was a great prophet, and Jesus was just another of the great prophets of the world.

Why is this wrong? Two reasons;

First if Jesus was just a prophet and not God, than the cross is meaningless.

What gives the cross significance is that God became man to atone for all the sins of humanity, from Adam and Eve until the end of time.

If Jesus was just a prophet and not God, he couldn't atone for that level of sinfulness in creation. No mortal could.

And if those sins haven't been atoned we have no way to get to heaven.

Second reason; if Jesus was only a prophet, the resurrection is meaningless.

By allowing himself to be crucified, Jesus testified the Father's love for creation.

In Jesus rising from the dead, the Father testified to the authenticity of the Son so that creation might believe in that love.

No other "prophet" has ever managed to raise himself from the dead.

Finally, some people, and some Catholics believe that Jesus was just a great teacher.

He was a revolutionary, liberal, teacher who was flying in the face of traditional ways of thought. Also wrong.

This was the mistake Judas Iscariot made. He thought Jesus was just a teacher.

On the eve of the crucifixion, at the last supper, Jesus say's "I assure you, one of you is about to betray me."

Every apostle in turn says, "Surely it is not I Lord!" But when it comes to Judas, he says, "Surely it is not I *rabbi*." Rabbi, teacher, not Lord.

Why is this so dangerous? Because you can disagree with a teacher, but would anyone dare say that they disagree with God?!

If I stood up in a math class and said " $2+2=5$ , I'm sure the students would say, "No,  $2+2=4$ ." WHY does two and two equal four?

Why can't it equal five? How about in all my mathematics I say that  $2+2=5$ , because that's what I believe, so that's what I'll do.

If I did that I'm sure the government would have a few questions on my taxes.

People who believe that Jesus was only a teacher have no problem living by their own rules and making statements like; I'm a Catholic, but I disagree with the Church on whatever issue.

Like the number of Catholics I've seen on facebook with the rainbow colors over

their profile pictures. What are they saying? Gay marriage is OK. God is wrong. The Church is wrong, because I FEEL there's no problem with it. If Jesus was a teacher only, there's no problem disagreeing with his teaching, so they have no problem believing that the Church is a human institution only, and not also a Divine one, led by the Holy Spirit.

That is why Jesus couldn't work any miracles in our Gospel today, because the crowd sees him as a teacher only, and they were even questioning that.

If we want Jesus to work in our lives we must be willing to take a step in faith. If we want Jesus to transform our troubled lives into lives of peace, we must be willing to accept the whole person of Jesus; the miracle worker, the prophet, the teacher, and most importantly, God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. How do we undergo this transformation?

How do we get the faith we need so that Jesus can work miracles in our lives?

Prayer and sacraments. We pray for Grace. We can't be mercenary prayers.

Mercenary pray-ers pray only when they want something.

That's treating Jesus like a magician again, a wonder worker.

We should pray to get to know God, and to recognize him working in our lives.

Pray before a crucifix! Pray before the tabernacle. Pray in your car as you drive to work.

Pray especially, before and after you receive him in the Eucharist.

That's how we become transformed.

Just as in Nathaniel Hawthorn's story, Earnest was transformed into the image he gazed at for so many years.

When we meditate upon the mystery of God becoming man, when we listen to the

Lord in scripture, and consume him in the Eucharist, we gaze upon him.

And the more we gaze upon him, the more we become like him.

And the more we become like him, the more we are transformed.

I pray today for that transformation. I pray it for myself. I pray it for all of you. I

pray that transformation for the nation. May God protect America.