

# Our Sunday Readings

ISAIAH 50:4-9a  
 PSALM 116:1-6,8-9  
 JAMES 2:14-18  
 MARK 8:27-35

## The Way

### JAMES 2:14-18

#### **Reading closely**

1. How do you respond to the series of questions in vv. 14-16?
2. Why might someone say “you have faith and I have works”?
3. What does James mean by *works*?
4. How can faith be *dead*?
5. Can faith be demonstrated in a way other than works?
6. Why might James have written this?

#### **Living the word**

7. Have you thought that faith was better than works (or vice versa)?
8. Why must faith be demonstrated through works?
9. How does this passage challenge you?

### THE SECOND READING

#### **Lived faith**

James bluntly states that Christian faith must show itself in deeds of service and justice. Although some people think he contradicts Paul on this matter, the two apostles are in perfect agreement.

Paul makes it clear that a person can't earn (i.e., *work for*) salvation because eternal life is a gift from God, which we accept in faith. However, Paul also insists that we demonstrate our faith by living just, moral lives. (Examples include 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:13f.; Ephesians 4:25f.; and 1 Timothy 6:17f.).

Moreover, Jesus repeatedly demonstrated in his own ministry that faith entails action on behalf of others. Genuine love for God and neighbor includes caring for people's physical needs.

*Show me your faith apart from your works,  
 and I by my works will show you my faith.*

**MARK 8:27-35**

**Reading closely**

1. Why do you think Jesus asks his disciples who other people think he is?
2. Does Peter's answer sound like a strong or weak affirmation of Jesus?
3. Do you think the other disciples agree with Peter?
4. Does Jesus want people to know who he is?
5. How would you have reacted to v.31?
6. Why do you think Peter pulls Jesus aside?
7. How do you think Peter feels when Jesus calls him *Satan*?
8. What's the difference between how God and human beings think?
9. What does Jesus' statement in v.34 mean?
10. What does *life* mean in v.35?

**Living the word**

11. What are ways in which people give up their lives for Jesus and the gospel?
12. What makes it easy to suffer for the gospel? What makes it hard?
13. How are you trying to *save your life*?

**THE GOSPEL READING**

**A turning point**

Jesus' teaching and wondrous works have repeatedly caused people to ask who he is. Now he addresses this question. His timing is significant: he's traveling *along the way*. *The way* is a metaphor for Christian discipleship. As Jesus journeys to his own death, he teaches people what following his way requires of them.

**Who is he?**

The disciples sum up the different ideas people have about Jesus' identity.

- maybe Jesus was a sort of reincarnation of *John the Baptist*
- some believed *Elijah* would precede God's own arrival (Malachi 3:23)
- Jesus is like *the prophets* of old who called people back to God

In each case Jesus points ahead to God's coming. Peter's response is more accurate but still in need of revision.

**Messiah**

A *messiah* is someone who's *anointed* as a sign that God chose him for a particular mission or role. Jews had different ideas about who the messiah would be and what he would do. No Jew, however, expected the messiah to suffer and be killed.

Jesus accepted the title but changed its meaning. Whereas *messiah* once meant triumph and victory, now it includes rejection, shame, and hardship. Jesus himself used the title *Son of Man* because it carried fewer pre-conceptions.

**Rejections**

Each time Jesus speaks about his forthcoming suffering, his disciples reject or don't understand what he means. Jesus then explains what true discipleship entails (9:30-37; 10:32-45).

Although Peter calls Jesus *messiah*, he rejects the new meaning Jesus gives this term. Peter even *rebukes* Jesus. The word *rebuke* describes how Jesus expels demons. Jesus thus rebukes Peter for acting like Satan, who tempted Jesus to avoid the difficult aspects of his ministry.

**What will we say and do now?**

Peter calls Jesus *the Christ* but rejects the way of Christ. We're no different: we favor self-interest over self-denial. Jesus warns that this approach will save our earthly life but cost us our eternal one.

This passage began with Jesus asking his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" It ends with a second unspoken question, "What will you do because of who I am?"

**PRAYER**

*by St. Ignatius of Loyola*

Lord, teach me to be generous.  
 Teach me to serve you as you deserve;  
 to give and not to count the cost,  
 to fight and not to heed the wounds,  
 to toil and not to seek for rest,  
 to labor and not to ask for reward, save that of knowing that I do your will. Amen.