

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Sep 24th 2015

Today's Gospel features King Herod the Tetrarch. He asks about Jesus: "Who is this about whom I hear such things?" His question echoes virtually the same question by many others earlier in Luke's Gospel. Here are a few examples:

The Scribes and Pharisees react to the Lord's forgiving the paralytic's sins by saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies?" (Chapter 5). John the Baptist's disciples ask Jesus, "are you the one who is to come?" They want to know who He is! (Chapter 7). A group of Pharisees at dinner with Jesus murmur among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (later in Chapter 7). Our Lord is taking a nap in Peter's boat, when treacherous storm arises, and it swamps the boat. Shaken and panicked, they wake Him up, and He calms the storm. They were "amazed," and say to one another: "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him!" (Chapter 8).

Luke then narrates subsequent miraculous works of Jesus: He casts legions of demons out of the Gerasene demoniac, restores a young girl to life, and heals a woman who touched the tassel of His garment. He proceeds to mission His 12 apostles, and right after that King Herod, in today's gospel, expresses his perplexity: "Who is this fellow, anyway?" He's afraid this Jesus, attracting so many followers, might be a threat, might usurp his power. But he is curious too: ". . . he kept trying to see Him," says Luke. He hears that Jesus heals others, performs miracles, and His followers say He is their Messiah, their King! "Who is this fellow, anyway?"

Then comes the pivotal passage of Luke's Gospel: "Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him. He asked them, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?' They answered, 'John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has risen.' He said to them, 'but who do you say that I am?' Peter answered: 'the Messiah of God'" (Chapter 9). You can imagine Jesus then looking into Peter's eyes, thinking "He gets it!" From this point on, the "Messianic Secret" is broken, and the Lord sets His face towards Jerusalem where, openly, He will make known His identity as Messiah – to be fully revealed in His passion, death, and resurrection.

Peter's confession, "You are the Messiah of God" and the Lord's ownership of that identity answers the question, "Who is this man?" That title, "Messiah," has roots in the Old Testament from the time of King David, and its significance develops increasingly through Old Testament times, into the time of Christ, and in early Christianity becomes a common designation for Jesus. From the Old Testament, through the Gospels, Paul's letters, and into the writings of the early Church Fathers, the title "Messiah" provides a rich description of who this man Jesus was and is now: "The Anointed of Yahweh" – "King" – "Prophet" – "Priest" – "Servant of Yahweh" – "Suffering Servant" – "King of Israel" – "King of Peace" – "the Christ" – "Messiah Christ" – "Savior" – "Redeemer" – "Irreproachable Lamb of God" – "The Promised One" – "Christ the Lord" – "Son of David" – "Son of Man" – "Son of God."

The answer to Herod's question, "Who is this Man?" is all the above. The Lord's question to the Apostles "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter's answer "The Messiah of God" are, it seems to me, a wonderful invitation for us to ponder the question and personally to answer it. The more we come to know Jesus, the Messiah of God, the more we will come to love Him and the closer we will follow Him.

Kevin Kersten, S.J.-Creighton University's School of Law