

**PENTECOST:  
A TIME TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE AND ACTIVE**

**Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Proper 19**

**September 13, 2009**

**Isaiah 50:4-9a**

**Psalm 116:1-9**

**James 3:1-12**

**Mark 8:27-38**

**On the Road to Jerusalem**

Situated at the very center of Mark's Gospel, today's reading recalls its opening words about "Jesus Christ the Son of God" and foretells the events described in its last chapters: Jesus' passion and death.

As Jesus leads his disciples on a journey that will take him to Jerusalem and his crucifixion, the question of his identity is raised one more time. This question had already been asked and answered earlier in Mark's Gospel (see 6:14-15). In the popular view, Jesus was either a new incarnation of John the Baptist or Elijah or an unspecified prophet. While this view is also quoted in today's reading, Peter moves the discussion to a different level by proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One or the Messiah.

Peter's confession, which is recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, is followed by Jesus' injunction of secrecy, the prediction of his death and resurrection, and his teaching about discipleship. Taken together, these three themes clarify Peter's statement by depicting a Messiah that bears little resemblance to the triumphant Davidic king the Israelites were expecting to see.

After the call for secrecy, which suggests the presence of a hidden danger, Jesus speaks openly of his impending suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. His humiliation and vindication recall the so-called "Servant Song" in Isaiah 50, a text which is also included in today's readings, while his acceptance of suffering and death foreshadows his prayer in Gethsemane.

Unable to understand and accept Jesus' imminent death, Peter rebukes him privately for entertaining such thoughts. Jesus, however, then publicly rebukes Peter and uses it as an opportunity for teaching the true meaning of discipleship. According to Jesus, following him means denying oneself and sharing his cross.

As we consider how difficult it is to become a follower of Jesus, may we feel encouraged by Augustine's comment on today's reading: "How hard and painful does this appear ...

but what he commands is neither hard nor painful when he himself helps us” (*Sermon* 46.1). Yes, discipleship is a costly decision, but the eternal reward we receive from our Savior is an incomparable treasure.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Dr. Liana Lupas, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Curator of the Library and Scripture Collection.

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Gambia** – With thanks to God for the dedication of the *God’s Story* film in Mandinka, for work with the Network of Bible Storytellers, and for the publication of the *David* comic in Mandinka, and with prayers that the *God’s Story* film and Bible storytelling will touch TAZI people; **Ghana** – With thanks to God for good progress with the *One Million Bibles for School Children* project, for the opportunity to distribute Scriptures at the Africa Cup of Nations, and for the smooth start to the Dagaare translation project, and with prayers for the Ewe translation project which suffered due to the death of translator Eleabenam Tenge, and with prayers for his family and that the project will not be delayed; **Senegal** – With thanks to God for the launch of the Serere Bible, the first Bible in a local language, and with prayers that it will touch many people, and with prayers for the Bible Society’s translation projects and for the TAZI projects.

**Activity Corner:** “Messiah” Acrostic

Supplies needed: Bible; newsprint and marker and/or writing paper and pens or pencils; drawing paper and crayons (for younger children).

Read Mark 8:27-30 and reflect on Jesus’ question to the disciples: “Who do you say I am?” How would you answer this question? Invite members of your household to share their thoughts on how they would describe Jesus. Write these descriptions on a sheet of newsprint or paper. Young children may wish to draw a picture of the way they picture Jesus.

On a sheet of newsprint (and/or on individual sheets of paper for each participant), write the word MESSIAH in large letters vertically. Using the letters from the word MESSIAH, describe Jesus (the letters can appear at the beginning, middle, or end of a word or phrase); for example:

Son of **M**an  
Fri**E**nd  
**S**avior

Conclude with a prayer that incorporates these descriptions of Jesus and by singing “What A Friend We Have in Jesus” or one of your favorite hymns.