

# Connecting with the Sunday Readings

**Twenty-fourth Sunday  
of Ordinary Time**      **Gospel Word**  
Mark 8:27-35

Scripture scholars tell us that today's reading is among the most important in the Gospel according to Mark. Jesus asks those closest to him about what others thought of him. It's almost as if he's taking an informal opinion poll. Eventually, he turns to Peter who without hesitation says that Jesus is the Messiah. End of story? Not yet. The Jewish people had diverse opinions about the role of Messiah. Some expected a powerful king to come and unite the nation of Israel. Some hoped for a powerful warrior who would drive the hated Romans from their lands and restore self-rule to the Jews. Some expected a cosmic leader from the sky who would decimate the enemies of Israel and turn them into ash. A few hoped for a holy prophet who would ignite greater interest in God.

Here, Jesus describes his role. It wasn't what his closest friends thought it would be. Jesus would be rejected by the religious leaders, would suffer and die, and would rise on the third day. All views of the Messiah were cast in human terms of victory and success and had to be revised by those who would follow him.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

## Living the Word

Jesus teaches the disciples about the paradox of his suffering, death, and Resurrection, and informs them that the same paradox is the lot of those who accept the call to follow him. This is hard news. One of the greatest stumbling blocks to belief in a good God, or any God for that matter, is the reality of suffering and death. Why do good people suffer? Why innocent children? There is no simple answer even for those with deep religious faith. For the most part, the answers remain a mystery.

We all live with expectations and assumptions about the way things ought to be. We want the best for everyone. But life can take turns that are totally unexpected and the opposite of what we had hoped for. This is especially true when it comes to the bigger aspects of life like death, major illnesses, disabling accidents, and other tragedies that come without warning. Jesus does not stand outside the experience of suffering, but freely enters into profound suffering himself that included his terrible death by crucifixion. Suffering is part of human life. So is the cross, but it leads to the new life of Resurrection for all of us. Even in this life, suffering transforms us; it makes us new people.

Take some time to reflect this week on how difficulties and tragedies in your life have been transforming events for you.

## One-line Prayer

God the potter, help us to be transformed by the crosses of our lives.  
Amen.