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“Who do you say that I am?” (Luke 9:19).

Eccles 3:1-11; Luke 9:18-22

Yesterday’s first reading from Ecclesiastes gave us the familiar phrase, “Vanities of vanities.” Today we hear more familiar words, “There is a season for everything under the heavens,” made popular by the 1950s folk song by Pete Seeger, “Turn, Turn, Turn.” The earlier theme of hopeless vanity shifts to a sense of wonder at the mystery of time and creation revealing the inner design and purpose known only to God. Yet, this secret poses the central questions pursued by both science and religion: What is a human being, and what is the purpose of human life?

Jesus focuses these questions on himself when he asks his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” For if Jesus is the Christ, God’s Anointed, he reveals to us the secret of our own identity and purpose. He is the visible face of the invisible God, the image and likeness of God in human form. To know who he is to know who we are. By his Incarnation, Jesus restored to every human being the “original blessing,” the *imago Dei* that is our birthright from Creation but lost because of the distortions of sin. He is the human being we are all meant to be.

This secret self stirs in human consciousness like a primal dream children know naturally but that is muted by culture and society to fit us into the limited roles that serve the interests of power. Jesus awakened the dream in people by his presence and preaching. He liberated them to know their authentic dignity as children of God. The healing and freedom that flowed from Jesus into the crowds was the restoration of their birthright as human beings created in the image of God.

When Jesus poses the question, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter blurts out the answer, not from his head but from a graced instinct leaping up from deep within him. “The Christ!” Of course! The thrill of the Gospel is therefore not just about Jesus but also about us. In his letters, St. Paul describes Jesus as the firstborn of the dead, the eldest of many brothers and sisters, the pioneer of our salvation. He presents baptism as our incorporation into the death and resurrection of Christ, the basis for all Christian formation and the path to life with God.

The Word of God comes to us not just through sermons or books but from within. It is the secret design and purpose within Creation and therefore whispering within our consciousness even if it takes a lifetime for us to hear and respond. Jesus’ question eventually surfaces in every human life, either as a cry for meaning or a prayer filled

with joy and gratitude. When we ask, “Who am I?” we echo his question, “Who do you say that I am?” Whether through a glass darkly or a moment of final revelation, we are all destined to meet him face to face, for God has made us to know him through the mystery of Christ.

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