

Q&A with Jesus

In my school visits, I welcome the opportunities for question and answer sessions with the students. It gives me a sense of how they are doing, what their concerns are and how the Church can teach and accompany them. The questions will, of course, vary with the age group. The young ones will wonder about my age, if I have a pet, what my favourite colour might be, and pose such sleep-depriving questions as: "How come ya gotta wear two hats?!" As they grow older the questions become more serious. They want to know about human sexuality, the nature of marriage, issues around sanctity of life, the relation between religion and science, matters of social justice, etc. Quite often my answers to one student will lead to more questions from others who are listening.

This dynamic of Q&A is at the heart of the Gospel passage we heard proclaimed on Sunday (*Mark 12:28-34*). A scribe approaches Jesus with what has to rank among the most serious of all questions. "Which commandment is the first of all?" It is clear that obedience to the commandments is important to the questioner. By asking which is first he seeks to know what commandment among all the precepts of the Jewish law gives light and coherence to the whole. Jesus provides the answer by uniting love of God with that of neighbour and asserts: "There is no other commandment greater than these." In his heart the questioner can recognize that Jesus has spoken the truth and voices his acquiescence.

When I compare this Q&A session with the ones I have with students, what jumps out at me is the response of the crowd that has been listening to the exchange between Jesus and the scribe. Students listening to answers given to a colleague usually respond with their own questions. Not so with the crowd in the Gospel passage. Of them it is said, "After that no one dared to ask Jesus any question." It is important that we understand why.

Upon hearing the answer of the scribe to his teaching, Jesus looked at him and said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." In other words, "You are drawing near, but you are not there yet!" Jesus had just confirmed for him that God must be loved "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." Genuine love of God is a total gift of self to God, so to the scribe Jesus is saying that there is more of him he has yet to give. The crowds, hearing this, realize that, were they to ask Jesus a question, he would likely point out to them where they need to change, what more they need to give of themselves if their love of God is to be perfect. So, they fall silent. They choose not to risk the question.

There are many questions we long to put to Jesus. What has happened to my life? Why is their tension and strife in my family? What is the reason for this anxiety that grips me? How did my life go so far off the rails? What am I to do

with this guilt that inhabits me? The Gospel passage invites us to pose the question with serenity and faith, and to accept, in trust and obedience, whatever Jesus will answer. It is sure that the answer of the Lord will always challenge us and call us to deeper conversion. It is equally certain that the Lord's answer will always be given in love and will lead us only toward the good.

Ask the question. Don't be afraid of the answer. Honest and trusting Q&A with the Lord is what leads us to light and life.