

THE UPPER ALDE BENEFICE

The Twenty-first Sunday of the Year (Trinity 11)

'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' (S Matthew 16:14)

After many years of ministry in and around Galilee, Jesus sent his disciples to circulate among the crowds and listen to what people were saying about him. Many were full of praise. They identified him as one of their heroes from history. He was like Moses the law-giver, or Elijah the great prophet. However well intentioned, this was damning with faint praise. It is as if you or I looked at a portrait by Rembrandt, and said, 'Oh, that's a nice picture!'

One of the constant themes which we have come across as we have been reading through S. Matthew this year is the ever present opposition from the religious leaders encountered by Jesus. This is almost worse than that open hostility. It's surprising how we see the same reaction today. 'Oh, Jesus is alright. He was a good man, a great teacher. We have a lot to learn from him. Too bad he was crucified and did before is time.

People are perfectly able to respect Jesus as a good person. However, something more is required.

'Who do you say that I am?'

Our Lord did not send out his disciples because he was curious about what the crowds thought. He sent them out to listen, so that they would think and reflect, and then make a decision for themselves. It does not matter what others say about Jesus. It does not matter if our grandparents, parents, our whole family, and our friends are Christians, agnostics or atheists. Each one of us has to answer that question, 'Who do you think I am?'

Inevitably it is Simon who answers accurately, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' For his faith Simon is given a new name. He is Peter. He is to become the rock, the source of strength and authority for the new community, the Church, the followers of this newly revealed Christ.

Whatever our role in life, whatever our position in the Church, our starting point is the same as that of S Peter and the other disciples. We have to answer the same question our Lord put to them. Who do we say Jesus is? Can we answer, not just with the mind but also with the heart?

Another light bulb question.

How many Liberals does it take to change a light bulb?

At least ten, as they need to hold a debate on whether or not the light bulb exists. Even if they can agree upon the existence of the light bulb, they still might not want to change it, to keep from alienating those who might prefer other forms of light.