



## Things to Ponder

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### Who do you say I am? – (Matthew 16:13-20)

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By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

A 15-year-old boy and his father were driving past a tiny airport in a small town in Ohio. Suddenly a low-flying plane spun out of control and nose-dived onto the runway. Minutes later the boy was pulling the dead pilot out of the plane, only 20 years old. The boy had been working part-time in a drugstore. Every penny he made he spent on flying lessons. His goal was to get his pilot's license when he turned 16. The boy's parents wondered what effect the tragedy would have on their son. Would he stop taking lessons, or would he continue?

The next day the mother noticed on her son's dresser an open notebook, one he had kept from childhood. Across the top of the page was written, "The Character of Jesus." Beneath was written, "He freed people from sickness and from fear. He gave them hope." The mother saw that in her son's hour of decision he was turning to Jesus for guidance. A few days later his mother saw her son leaving the house at the time he usually left for flying lessons. He turned to her and said, "Mom, I hope you and Dad will understand, but with God's help, I must continue to fly."

That boy was Neil Armstrong. And on July 20, 1969, he became the first man to walk on the moon. Few people who watched that historic event on television knew that one of the reasons Neil Armstrong was walking on the moon was Jesus. They didn't know that it was from Jesus that he drew strength and guidance, and overcame fear to make a crucial teenage decision that was now responsible for his walking on the moon.

The tragedy Neil confronted forced him to answer the question that Jesus poses to Peter and the rest of the disciples in today's Gospel (Matthew 16:13-20), and the same question He poses to us every day, "Who do you say that I am?" Since we most often refer to Jesus as our Savior, we should ask, "What does He save me from?" We might respond that He saves us from Hell. But ours is not a particularly "hell conscious" generation. To sincerely call Jesus our Savior we have to think of Him as meeting a more immediate need.

We know well our many human weaknesses that lead to consequences from which we want to be saved right here and now. The list of the seven deadly sins convinces us of this: pride, anger, lust, greed, gluttony, envy and sloth. Wouldn't our lives be far better, happier and healthier without them? But let's just look at the first of these sins,

the sin of pride, which can be described as “the temptation to the inner circle.”

There is in all of us a deep-seated need to find some basis on which we can feel superior to others in some way. Maybe it’s wealth and possessions, or an excellent education, or our religion, gender, or ethnic heritage. Maybe it’s our looks. Some years ago in a small Midwestern town a student killed two other students in retaliation for their calling him “pizza face” because he had a severe case of acne. His going to school each day became a hell on earth for him because of the ceaseless taunts of these two students. In retaliation he caused a hell on earth for his school and community by killing them.

Jesus came to save us from the “hell on earth” that life is for those filled with pride and for the victims of their prejudices. With Jesus’ saving grace we can wipe away from our eyes the films of prejudice that keep us from seeing every human being as a person to love. St. Paul tells us today, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free person, neither male nor female.” For all these manifestations of pride and prejudice are erased in our oneness with Christ. This is just one area where Christ is our Savior here and now. What are some of the others? How will you answer Jesus’ question about His relevance in saving us here and now: “Who do you say that I am?”

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