

Views from the Pews – Identity: Fake or Real?

Identity is a topical issue, in both the secular and sacred worlds. We can choose between a real, digital, fake, stolen, or whatever identity the next technology creates. Identity, names and pervasive labels are linked. We often claim them for ourselves, and latch onto words or phrases that define us or others.

For example, Mother's Day was recognised in May. We, or our children, possibly remember labels once given us as mothers, such as 'messy', 'dis-organised', or 'capable'. We perhaps attached labels to our own mothers, such as 'strict' or 'inflexible'. Who we think we are, or strive to be, often determines how we live. The more we repeat these labels, the more we live up to them, or allow them to colour our opinion of others.

However, as John 3:21 states, true identity is not built on career performance or achievements, but on Christ. The emphasis of scripture on who we are and what we are called to be enables other's opinions to matter less, so that our God given personalities, gifts and passions may shine through. We struggle with our own identity only because we seek it everywhere except in Jesus.

The power of personal identity is one of the main reasons God spends so much of the Bible telling us a story different from the one we learn from the world. This message resonates throughout the words of our eucharistic liturgy. God himself has many names, ('The Great I AM,' 'Lion of Judah', 'Jehovah Jireh' and more), yet only one identity.

Jesus called himself the 'Son of David', The Messiah, and One of the Trinity. His hearers and disciples were challenged with his question "But who do you say that I am?" (Matt 16:15) Many of them answered incorrectly, but Matt 16:13 directly addresses Jesus's identity, nature and mission. In Jn 8:12 and 14, Jesus firmly asserts the same.

Jesus calls us his chosen children and a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), with no qualifiers added. Our true identity in God supercedes all our earthly identities. When we choose to claim this gift, and the promise of unconditional acceptance and love, we can lead a full life, confident that God will look after us, more than we can imagine. Let's remember the refrain "I am a child of God; I am, who you say I am". Eph 2:10; 1 Peter 1:3; 2 Cor 5 16-17; Col 2:6-10.

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