

Homily for 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

My mother died seven years ago this weekend. The experience of my mother's death was quite different than that of my father. My mother's death was a blessing; my father's, a shock.

The difference was that my mother had suffered from Alzheimer's disease for nearly eight years. I learned first-hand how frightening a disease it is as I watched her slowly disappear into the hazy mist of forgotten time, places and people. Alzheimer's is an insidious disease. It robs you of what makes life beautiful – your memory and your relationships. As the years progressed my mother's ability to recognize people or even remember events became greatly diminished. There were days when I would say to her "Do you know who I am?" Many times she did; sometimes she didn't.

I recalled my mother when I read Jesus' question: "Who do you say I am?" He was asking His friends the same question I asked her: "Do you know who I am?" Suddenly this Gospel passage took on a different meaning.

For the first time I felt Jesus' words echoing in my heart rather than in Peter's. I began to wonder if I hadn't suffered a touch of spiritual Alzheimer's as I tried to answer that question honestly. I remembered

times in my life when it seemed so easy to answer the question. But I also recalled moments when I seemed to have forgotten who Christ is...and more importantly...who Christ is within my own heart.

If Jesus Christ is the Lord of all life and the Master of my own, why is it that I sometimes fail to be the person God intends me to be? Why does it happen more often than I would like that I live less as a believer in the Gospel and more like one who has forgotten that Christ is indeed the Son of God and my Redeemer?

None of us is that special that we stand alone...away from or above everyone else. In some profound sense we are very much the same. And in our sameness we discover that all of us can suffer from the spiritual Alzheimer's which I find in my own life. All of us sometimes forget who we are because we forget that we belong to Christ who is the source and summit of our lives.

Just as Jesus stood before Peter and asked him.. "Do you know who I am?", He stands before us as individuals and as a community and repeats the same question. He waits for us to answer, to proclaim that He is our Lord and Savior. But not just proclaim it...live it. Our love and compassion for family and friends, our dedication to what is right and just, our taking the first step toward reconciliation and forgiveness, our

kindness and our generosity...this is how we live our confession of faith that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of the world.