



I want to ask you a very serious question of you as I begin this homily. What do you think of Donald Trump? If I opened this question to the entire church for discussion, I wonder what would happen. I suspect there would be some very intense discussions with lots of strong feelings being present among us. I do not think there would be too many people who would have no thoughts about the question. There would be those who are passionate in defense of President Trump, and there would be those who wish he was never elected. Have no fear. I do not intend to raise this question for discussion. It is one thing to joke about the Yankees and the Mets, but I find the many of us have very strong opinions on the President that can almost bring good friends and family to painful arguments.

Let me ask a second question then. What do you think of Jesus Christ? This is the question that we hear Jesus ask Peter in today's Gospel: *Who do people say that I am?* This is the most important question that one can ponder and discuss in his or her life. It is the question that determines how I choose to live my life, and where I think I will be after I take my last breath on earth.

However, I honestly do not think this question that Jesus asked of Peter and of all of us would raise our emotions to the level of the first question about the president. I believe we may be resistant to respond to such a question for many reasons: If I say I love Jesus, people will think I am putting on airs and acting like a holy roller; If I say, I am not really sure about my feelings about Jesus, some might think I do not have faith and judge me in negative way; If I say that I have real doubts about my faith in Jesus, they

might ask me what am I doing in church; If I said what I think, I might give *“the wrong answer.”* Full disclosure: I have been seriously pondering on this question of Jesus since I have been about 17 years old. There are times in my life when I am very much in love with the Lord and feel a close relationship with him, there are times when I feel like I am going through the motions and taking Jesus for granted, there are times when I do not want to address this question too much because I am afraid that Jesus might challenge me in a way that I would cause me to change from comfort level, and there are some times when I wonder if Jesus is really important in my day to day living.

Last Saturday night, after a rather busy day, I looked forward to going to sitting in my man cave and watching some television. The Jets were playing an exhibition game and the Mets were losing. So, I began to channel surface for something to watch. Since nothing attracted me on all 450 cable stations, I decided to look for a movie on demand. I noticed a movie that was available for \$4.95 called *The Case for Christ*. Again, full disclosure: I tend to avoid religious movies since so many of them in my opinion are not well made. However, I looked at the previews and saw that the movie was about a man named Lee Strobel. I heard of him and knew of his writings but have never read any of them. So, being somewhat bored, I decided to give the film a shot.

The movie is based on a true story, but I am sure some sections were adapted by the filmmaker to make it more interesting. Still, I found the movie very interesting and quite apropos to the question of the Gospel: *Who do you say that I am*. Here is how Strobel describes his life: *My story is a love story that started when Leslie (his wife) and I met when we were 14 years old and grew up together and got married young. I was atheist and she was agnostic, so we were pretty evenly matched and happy in our marriage. And then she ends up becoming a Christian—which, the first word that went through my mind was “divorce.”* Strobel is an award winning investigative journalist in the late 1970’s for the *Chicago Times*. So, he decides that he will use his skills as a journalist and investigator to debunk Christianity and bring his wife back to being what he considers *normal*. Strobel begins his investigation by studying the accounts resurrection of Jesus Christ. He feels that Christianity hinges entirely, and it does, on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without the resurrection, Jesus is just an itinerant preacher who lived 2000 years ago, had some followers, and died at the hands of the Romans. Strobel begins an intensive study, interviewing archeologist, medical doctors, scripture scholars, psychologists and other experts.

The title of the movie tells the story: *The Case for Christ*. He does not want to believe in Jesus. He does not want his wife to believe. He wants his old life back. But he is honest man and his investigation leads him to the conviction based very much on solid provable evidence, that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead and is the Son of God. He writes, *the scientific data point powerfully toward the existence of a Creator and that the historical evidence for the resurrection establishes convincingly that Jesus is divine*. Strobel has written many books and now has devoted his life to preaching, teaching, and writing about Jesus Christ.

Lee Strobel, on finding the real Jesus wrote: *The scientific data point powerfully toward the existence of a Creator and that the historical evidence for the resurrection establishes convincingly that Jesus is divine.* So, today, once again, Jesus asks you and me: Who do you say that I am? It is the most important question you or I will ever answer. I certainly invite you to watch the movie or read the book *The Case for Christ*. Even better, I invite you to commit to making the ALPHA program that is being offered here at St. Martin's this September. As much as I enjoyed the movie about Strobel, I found entering into ALPHA was, as a parishioner said last week in a witness talk, a *game changer*. ALPHA has only one goal: to help the participant to meet Jesus Christ in a very real way.

I will end with a quote by another searcher who found Christ in his life after investing the Gospels, CS Lewis. This quote is both in the movie *The Case for Christ* and in the ALPHA course.

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Christ: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.

If you, or anybody you know, would like more information about ALPHA, you can contact me (woodscssr@aol.com) or call the rectory to sign up. I am confident if you make ALPHA, it will be a great decision in your life.