

Father O'Connor's Homily for 23 August 2026
21st Sunday in Ordinary Time-A

Isaiah 22: 19-23
Romans 11: 33-36
Matthew 16: 13-20

Eric Heiden is an American champion speed skater. At the age of 21, he won five individual gold medals in the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York. In school, he was always the top athlete. And whenever he entered a competition, he almost always won first place.

How would you like to compete with someone that you knew you had no chance of beating?

Actually other athletes wanted to compete with Eric. And the reason was that even though they could not beat him, they would compete at their absolute best in trying. Eric brought out of them what came to be known as “the Heiden effect.”

This reminds me a bit of today's Gospel. Jesus asks His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they answer, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He then asks them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Simon Peter replies, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

With Peter's profession of faith, it follows that you and I are never going to surpass Jesus Christ in holiness, or in anything else. We try to be like Him as His disciples. But we will never surpass Him. Still, with Jesus as our model, and with the assistance of His grace, we can strive to live our daily lives at our absolute best.

And so Jesus asks us: “And you, who do you say that I am?” And our answer is all-important for how we decide to live our lives. Do I really believe that Jesus' way of life is the best way for me to live? Am I allowing Jesus to bring the absolute best out of me so that, day by day, I am becoming “a better version of myself” as His faithful disciple, and as a grateful and generous steward of God's bountiful blessings?

“And you, who do you say that I am?” Jesus asks us.

Several summers ago I enjoyed a vacation in the Bahamas in Nassau on the ocean's shore. Every morning I got up before sunrise to watch and marvel at this great event. And so did a few other people. I remember two African-American women who were there every morning, and our conversations.

Jean told me that she had had a stroke the previous year and wondered if she would ever be able to travel again. And here she was. Her faith in God had gotten her through, she said. And she was there that morning with a grateful heart to welcome God's gift to her of another brand-new day.

Regina told me that she came to pray because she had learned to take no blessing from the Lord for granted. She said: "I need to be here first thing, before I get too busy and too distracted, just to remember how blessed I am today."

And I said to Jean and Regina: "God is good!" To which they immediately responded: "All the time!" And then they continued: "All the time... God is good!"

And Jesus asks us, "And you, who do you say that I am?"

A priest told this story on himself:

He was at the local McDonald's drive-up window. And when it came time to pay for his order he was told that the car ahead of him had already taken care of it.

He told the server that they probably recognized him from his parish. The server responded, "No, Father. It's not about you at all. This person does this regularly because she says it makes her feel so good to give."

The priest figured that he should return the favor. But when he looked in his rearview mirror at the truck behind him, he saw four big, hungry construction workers on their lunch break. So it was a pretty good-sized tab that he picked up for them. But he said that it made him feel so good to give. And now he does this regularly when he stops at a fast-food drive-up window.

Why does it feel so good to give? Because that is what God does for us all the time. God LOVES to give. "Yes, God so loved the world that He GAVE His only Son" [John 3: 16]. And Jesus GAVE His life for us on the cross so that we could live forever with Him in heaven. And it is when we GIVE of ourselves generously to others that we are most like Jesus Christ. We are at our absolute best and happiest when we GIVE.

Jesus asks us, "And you, who do you say that I am?"

In the movie "Titanic," we see a beautiful, young, privileged woman named Rose, who is tired of the social status that was smothering her, and who felt entrapped by her fiancé who was abusive and power-hungry. We see her, in her despair, about to jump off the ship and end her life when Jack Dawson, a penniless artist, talks her out of it. And when she begins to slip off the ship's rail, he grabs her arm and says: "I will never let go."

That line, "I will never let go," becomes a theme throughout the movie, all the way to the end when the Titanic is sinking, and Rose is floating on a piece of

debris and Jack is in the icy water. Rose lives and Jack dies, but still with her hand in his. “I will never let go.”

Jesus makes the same promise to us, and renews it with the dawn of each new day: “I will never let go.” In good times and in bad times, in sickness and in health, He will never let go.

God loves to give. And it is when we give of ourselves generously to others that we are most like Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God – and at our absolute best and happiest.

God is good... All the time! All the time... God is good!

“And you,” Jesus asks, “who do you say that I am?”