

Perhaps we've all been in those situations where the teacher is making statements and we are shaking our heads like we know exactly what he is getting out. However, most, deep down, pray they do not call on them because they really don't know what he is talking about!

We have a similar situation today with Jesus, the teacher, and his disciples. Jesus makes a statement (perhaps they are shaking their heads) and we are told they were afraid to ask, they did not understand and that they remained silent.

Why did they just not ask? Perhaps they were afraid to ask because they weren't listening to Christ. This weekend I have been assisting with a men's Cursillo retreat, which began Thursday evening. You could tell at the start, the candidates weren't exactly in tune with Christ, as it was obvious they were a bit preoccupied – thoughts of the workday or what they need to get done and found it difficult to really listen. You could tell, however, that as the retreat went on, they became intoned with the voice of Christ and became very aware of his presence.

It may be we do the same with Mass on the weekend – so preoccupied with what transpired during the week and what awaits us, that we have trouble settling down and listening to Christ? If so, I would suggest we leave all that at the door before entering and settle ourselves, for Jesus has much he wishes to tell us.

Another reason may have been that the disciples simply were afraid to ask because they didn't want to look dumb, so they remain dumb. We can be like this with our faith; we don't want to ask the question because we fear we might look dumb. Don't be afraid to ask Jesus, ask his priests or else we will nothing but dumb Catholics! My rector in seminary told us that it was inexcusable not to look up a word that we may come across while reading for an assignment that we do not understand. Jesus would agree.

We might also surmise they may have not asked Jesus anything is because they were arguing over petty stuff, stuff that had nothing to do with his teachings. They want to know who is more important, who can be "the man". This might be akin to priests seeking the title of Monsignor – nothing wrong with being Monsignors – the problem is with those who seek such a title.

Some of us do this within our parish, pouting about not being recognized in what we do for the church. For others, it is the insignificant stuff, complaining about this or that and missing why we gather altogether. Jesus wants us to focus on what is truly important in life: Our faith and our relationship with him. When preparing couples for marriage, I do try to impress upon them what really matters – which would not include the receptions and what have you, but their love for one another and the importance of Jesus in their lives. And to do so, we have to be willing to listen.

The gospel reminds us that Jesus is always speaking to us, always trying to tell us something. Sometimes after Mass (not here!) someone will say something to me that is truly hurtful (this usually comes from someone who is not listening to Jesus in their lives). Invariably, Jesus will inspire someone else to lift me up, as if Jesus were speaking to me: "Patrick, don't let them get you down – don't let them sidetrack you from what is important – my love." He impels us to

focus on what is imperative. If you truly want to understand what is central and important in life, ask someone who is dying and they will tell you what really matters.

Some of us cover our ears and yell out so they cannot hear. It is easier this way – easier to complain about what the Church teaches than to actually look it up to understand why. They do so because it may mean accepting something they do not want understand or face.

+It is like the story told of two brothers, Herbert and James, who lived with their mother and a cat, named Edgar. James was particularly attached to the cat, and when he had to leave town for several days, he left Herbert meticulous instructions about the pet's care. At the end of his first day away, James telephoned his brother. "How's Edgar?" He asked. "Edgar's dead, Herbert answered. There was a pause. Then James said: "Herbert, you're insensitive. You know how close I was to Edgar; you should've broken it to me slowly. When I asked about Edgar tonight, you should have said, "Edgar is on the roof, but I've called the fire department to get him down." And tomorrow when I called, you could have said the firemen were having trouble-getting Edgar down, but you were hopeful they'd succeed. Then when I called the third time, you could've told me that the firemen had done their best, but unfortunately Edgar had fallen off the roof and was at the veterinarian's. Then when I called the last time, you could've said that although everything possible had been done for Edgar, he'd died. That's the way a sensitive man would've told me about Edgar. And, oh, before I forget," James added, "how's mother?" "Uh," said the chastened and confused Herbert, pausing for a moment, "she's on the roof."

You see, to truly ask the question, to truly hear the answer might mean we have to move out of our comfort zones. It would be like a couple who is living together before marriage. Do they really want to ask Father if it is a sin? Does a child really want to ask his parents if there is anything they can do for them? Do we really want to ask Father if we are giving enough to the Church? Such questions will mean changes have to be made, so we remain silent, as this is much more convenient.

You see, the reason Jesus was tortured and murdered is because he spoke the Truth that we did not want to hear. That is what it comes down to. I remember visiting an elderly woman in the hospital. (Years ago, you would ask for the list of patients (and room number) and they would have their religious affiliation listed.) She immediately said to me after introductions and the like, she said "I'll tell you something. The Pope needs to stay out of a woman's womb." She then asked me to leave.

You see, she saw the priesthood of Jesus and it reminded her of a truth she did not want to face or hear, perhaps because of something she had done many years ago. Push Jesus away, remain silent in the Truth of his presence. It is sad, for Jesus, in his priesthood, would have offered her only mercy and the love that always goes with Truth. Love always follows Truth, or it is not truth. Truth without love is poison.

And so I end where we began, with a question: When we come face to face with Christ, will there be silence? What is it we will say when he ask us, "So, while on earth (your lifetime), what was it you were talking about?" Pray it is Jesus. Pray it is Jesus.