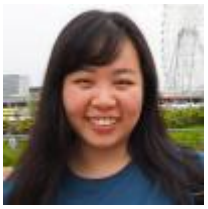
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Razvan Dumitrasconiu)



by Stephanie Ann Puen

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Welcome to Theologians' Corner, where each week a different woman theologian from around the world offers a fresh reflection on the Sunday readings.



21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 23, 2026

For today's reflection, I would like to raise three invitations for us to ponder, based on today's Gospel reading.

"*Who do they say I am?*"

The readings for today offer varying descriptions of God. They raise the question: How do we understand God in our lives? Is it in very philosophical terms, focusing on what we call the three "omnis" — omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence? Is it in terms of a punisher? Or perhaps God is a loving sibling, parent or guardian?

The readings all show different dimensions of God — a God who is loving, a God who is just, a God who has done marvelous and startling things.

In the Gospel, when Jesus asks about who people say he is, he also offers us a space to reflect on our image of God. We can imagine ourselves among the apostles when he asks this question, and we are asked to ponder who Jesus is, and in turn, who God is — and the implications of this in our lives, our understanding of the world and our relationship with others.

German theologian Rudolf Otto described the experience of holiness in encountering God as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, where we are awe-inspired, terrified and overwhelmed, but at the same time are fascinated and attracted to the holy. Thus, for this first invitation in this reflection, I would like to invite us to continue reflecting on our image of God — what it is, how it affects the ways in which we understand the world and relate to others, and how our image of God has evolved, as we have grown in our own faith.

"*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"

Peter says this in acknowledging who Jesus is in the Gospel — even though we see later on that he may not completely grasp the implications of what he has just confessed. We see Peter unsure of how to make sense of the Transfiguration, for example, in Matthew 17, a chapter later. Later on, Peter even denies knowing Jesus in Matthew 26, quite the opposite of his declaration that Jesus is the Son of God!

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We see in Peter what can also happen to us. We might say we know God, and know that Jesus is God, on an intellectual or cognitive level, but this knowledge may not permeate our being and, in turn, our ethics and our relationships with one another.

I can point to stories, both from my own experience and from the experiences of others, of how a person would say Jesus is Lord, complete with a Bible verse on their social media profile and cross around their neck. Yet the very same person would also send death threats and expletives to people with whom they disagree or whom they see as bad and undeserving of God's love.

This is thus a second invitation: When we confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God — do we mean it? In our very being, knowing, doing and loving? Do we commit to it, even as we may not entirely live it out?

"*And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.*"

Still we see that Peter becomes the first pope and becomes part of the foundation of the early Christian communities. It was not perfect, as we see in the stories of the early church in the book of Acts and the various letters of Paul, yet we see how Peter struggles and commits to the work of building up the church, despite the struggles and questions about whether the decisions they made were the correct ones.

This leads to the third and last invitation: How do we continue to commit to Jesus and the church in our lives, even when we know we would not be perfect disciples? How do we navigate the ups and downs of our calling as disciples of Jesus so that we are able to continue our commitment as Christians?

With these three invitations, the hope is that we can deepen our commitment to Christ through an awareness of our journey with Jesus — from knowing who God is, giving our yes to God, and following through with that yes in our everyday lives.

This story appears in the **Theologians' Corner** feature series. View the full series.