

HOMILY 21ST Sunday Ordinary Time
August 23, 2026

There was a second-grade art class that was drawing pictures. The teacher was walking around looking at what the students were drawing, and she noticed that one of the little girls was drawing very feverishly. The teacher stopped and asked her, “what are you drawing?” The little girl responded, “I am drawing God.” The teacher responded, “no one knows what God looks like.” And the little girl responded without looking up or missing a beat, “they will in a few minutes.” It is true that no one knows what God looks like, but the young girl may have captured it. And it certainly represents what God looks like to her.

In the Gospel reading Jesus asks a couple of questions. First, he asks, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” He gets various answers to this question and then he asks, “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Good answer. I think if I went and asked each of you individually you would agree that Jesus is God. But when you answer Jesus is God, I think that means something a little different to each one of you. Each one of us has a particular image of God that is unique to you. Here, I am not talking about just what God looks like, I am talking about the attributes you attribute to God. None of us can know God perfectly. God is way bigger than we can comprehend. But in reality, we create God in our own image to a certain extent. We create an image of God that we can understand. It is important that you are aware of your image of God because it effects your spirituality and the way your life is lived. And your image of God changes as you grow spiritually.

Your image of God and your everyday life interact all the time. When we were a young child, many of us probably developed a similar image of God. Does this sound familiar? God is an old man with long white hair and beard. He keeps track of when we are naughty and when we are nice. He punishes us when we are naughty

and he rewards us when we are nice. That was my image of God as a child, and that may have been yours. But is it an accurate representation of God? It sounds more like Santa Clause. One way to assess the accuracy of your image of God is through Jesus. Jesus is the invisible God made visible. When we cannot understand God completely, we can more easily understand Jesus. My childhood image of God is not very consistent with who Jesus is, but parts of that image may still be present with you today. How does this affect your relationship with God?

In the Gospel reading, Jesus first asks, “who do people say the Son of Man is?” When you are looking at your image of God, it is important to ask yourself that because our image of God is affected by what people say. Here are some examples, I always cringe when I hear people say, “God will punish you for that.” Jesus never punished anyone. I frequently hear people say, “all I can do is pray.” Well maybe, but Jesus frequently worked with people to solve problems. Maybe you can do your part and God will do his.

Your image of God is also affected by your perceived experience of God in your life. Here are a few questions you can ask yourself. Do you think you need to earn God’s love? Jesus loved and helped everyone he encountered. Is God present only to those who are holy? Jesus was always reaching out to the poor and the marginalized, prostitutes and tax collectors. When we pray does God sometimes just ignore our prayer? Jesus never ignored anyone. Is God distant from us in our daily lives? Jesus was right in there with everyone all the time. Even when he went off by himself to pray, he interrupted the prayer when someone needed him. Can you trust God to help you? Jesus always helped everyone who turned to him for help.

So today, I am going to invite you to spend some time defining your image of God, not just what God looks like, but who do you say he is. And then ask yourself how accurate of an image it is. Then ask yourself how your image of God affects your relationship with him.