

# Who are you, Jesus?

Pastoral letter from the Bishop of Mainz,  
Peter Kohlgraf,  
for the Easter penitential season 2025

## Sisters and Brothers in the diocese of Mainz,

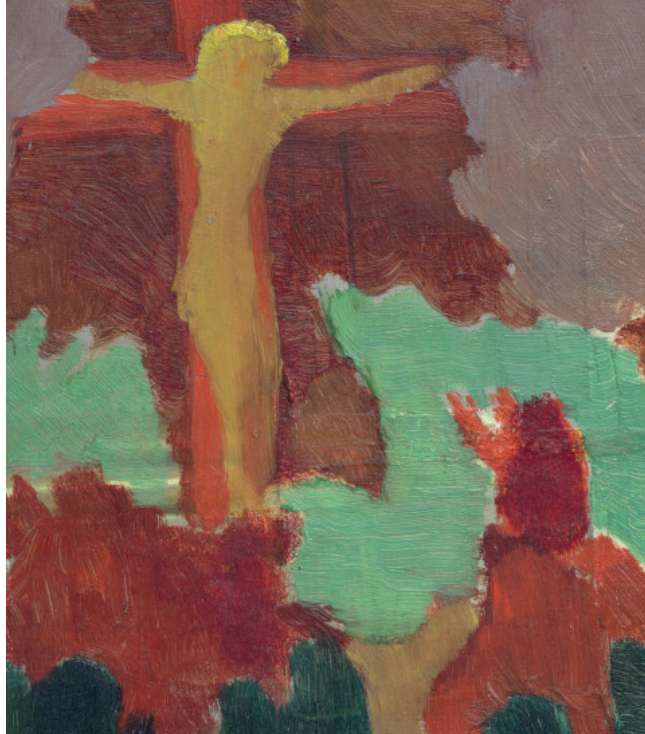
Who are you, Jesus? The answer to this question is not as simple as it may seem to some. There are at least two levels that concern us: One of them is the personal answer that is required of the believer. This answer remains infinitely varied and might change in the course of life, depending on the life situation or faith experience. Some things about the biblical Jesus fascinate me; others remain alien to me. I invite you to remain in lifelong dialogue with Jesus, to endure strangeness and to seek his closeness again and again. I speak of Jesus not only as a historical person, but also as the Risen One in whom I believe, at my side, at our side, in whose living presence I am convinced.

The other level concerns the answer that a community of faithful such as the church finds for itself and which creates a unity in the basic understanding of what unites us in faith in the one Lord, despite all our different approaches. It is precisely in the question 'Who are you, Jesus?' that the possibility of great diversity and deep unity in faith is revealed. Being a Christian never means diversity without unity, but neither does it mean unity without a necessary diversity. Especially at a time when we are struggling for synodality in the church, it seems to me that reflection on faith in Jesus Christ is the most important foundation for the essence of Christianity.

### The infinitely diverse approaches to Jesus, the Son of God

The most important sources for our talk about Jesus as Saviour and Son of God are the New Testament writings. The New Testament is not a single book, but consists of 27 books by various authors who offer their approach to Jesus in view of the different issues facing their communities. We know that there is not just one gospel in the New Testament, but four gospels, each with different approaches to Jesus. There are letters by different authors, the Acts of the Apostles that continues the Gospel of Luke, and the 'Revelation of John' with a world view that challenges us with its images of Christ as the Lamb of God as well as Lord of time and judge of mankind. In the various scriptures, we encounter Jesus in all his humanity, from birth to death; he encounters us as Lord, Judge, Saviour, Risen One and as the one who sits at the right hand of God.

Emotionally, the human Jesus is certainly very close to many people. It is the little child in the manger, in whom God's love is so vulnerably revealed, that touches most people around Christmas. Others are particularly moved by Jesus' healing of the sick and his compassionate care for the weak and guilty as a path to understanding the



*Only a few bold areas of color, dark blue in the foreground and bright in the background, come together to form a picture: people approach Jesus Christ on the cross, searching. The Catholic Parisian artist Maurice Denis (1870-1943) interpreted traditional Christian motifs using modern painting techniques. The small oil painting on wood "The Orange Christ" was created in 1889 and is now in the Cleveland Museum of Art.*

kingdom of God. Jesus' message of peace is divisive in the face of current conflicts: is it naive or does it remain crucial at this point in time? In the Crucified One, people at all times find themselves recognised in their suffering. The Easter stories still give hope to many people today because they believe the witnesses that Jesus is alive. The letters of the New Testament also reflect a variety of experiences of Jesus. For me, a central sentence can be found at the end of the Gospel of John (John 21:24f.): "This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. "

In his last encyclical 'Dilexit nos' (He loved us) from 2024, Pope Francis expands on the traditional devotion to the Sacred Heart and offers it to us as a source of access to Christ. I want to emphasize: There are legitimately as many approaches to Jesus as there are people who open themselves to him with their hearts and minds. It is part of the everyday life of the church to give other people a personal approach, because what the heart is full of, the mouth speaks about. Confessing Christ always requires a personal, individual testimony of faith.

This is what constitutes the richness of church faith and church community. Moreover, this is also the basis of the synodality that is often invoked today: taking the faith approaches of other believers seriously and valuing them as an enrichment. No one can grasp Christ on their own. Only in the many experiences of faith does he emerge as

in a mosaic and yet his entirety remains beyond our reach. I kindly invite you to reflect on how you can answer the following questions for yourself during these coming weeks of Lent: Who are you, Jesus - for me? Where can I bear witness, ask my questions and express my hopes in this Holy Year of Hope?

## The Church's unified confession of Jesus Christ, the Son of God

In the year 325, the first so-called Ecumenical Council took place in Nicaea. In 2025, we will be celebrating the 1700th anniversary of this central assembly, which had a long history: Various issues had caused a number of divisions in the church. Anyone who thinks that our current times in the church are particularly turbulent is invited to take a look at the 4th century. Questions around faith and organisational structure have always belonged together. Fearing a schism and his subsequent loss of power, Emperor Constantine had convened the council and around 250 bishops gathered in Nicaea. The heated debates concerned the nature of Jesus, his origin and relation to God the Father – was he of similar or identical essence with God the Father? Arius had triggered this dispute, which drove believers and bishops apart.

We may consider this question to be quibbling today, but it goes to the heart of the Christian faith. If Jesus wanted to redeem people, he had to be true God, because only God can grant redemption from guilt and death. He, who became flesh for us humans and suffered for us, had to be truly human, because according to ancient philosophical conviction, only that which God has truly accepted can be redeemed. The council was by no means peaceful. However, the creed formulated after many discussions and under pressure from the emperor was accepted by the majority. In 380, Emperor Theodosius finally brought the ongoing disputes to rest with an imperial decree in which he declared the Nicene Creed to be binding. The Council of Nicaea is inextricably linked to the Council of Constantinople, which took place in 381 and largely adopted the Nicene Creed.

The significance of these two councils is reflected in the fact that we still know and pray this creed today as the Nicene Creed (No. 586 in the diocesan hymn book Gotteslob), Christ is 'of one being with the Father, light from light, true God from true God'. He truly became man in our midst. This is the faith that unites all Christian denominations to this day. Despite all personal approaches to Christ,

the Council of Nicaea formulated a common foundation of faith. To this day, the Nicene Creed is the common foundation of church faith and life. It began in Nicaea, and subsequent councils have continued to write it. It requires unity in the diversity of personal approaches, because the individual approach alone only ever forms one piece of the mosaic of the whole, and it always requires a personal answer to the question of who Jesus is for me.

## Christians as pilgrims on the path of hope

Pope Francis has chosen this motto for the current Holy Year. The Holy Year is an invitation to reflect on Jesus as the reason for our personal hope, to deepen it in prayer and to dare to find our own answer. Jesus as the Son of God opens our eyes to the great hope beyond death. Our joint confession of faith opens our eyes to the value of community, because only together can we approach the great and diverse reality of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Being a Christian without fellowship in confession constrains us ultimately to our personal limitations. I need others in the church to enrich and complement my image of Christ. We need each other on the path of hope.

May this year bring us closer together in the community of faith and in the courage to give our personal answer to the question 'Who are you, Jesus - for me?' and at the same time may we learn to appreciate anew the value of the confession of faith.

I wish you all a blessed time until Easter and beyond throughout the Holy Year.

May the Almighty God, +the Father, +and the Son, +and the Holy Spirit, bless you all.

Yours



+ Peter Kohlgraf  
Bishop of Mainz

Mainz, on the 1st Sunday of Lent 2025



*Translation: Mark and Eva Baillie*