

What statement do your clothes make? Apart from their utilitarian function of covering our bodies, clothes serve as symbols of ourselves—our lifestyle (casual or formal); our profession or career (a uniform); our corporate identity (a sports team or fan [cardinal and gold in this town!]).

One of the symbols in the church’s rite of baptism is the white robe in which the newly baptized is clothed. In the case of infants this “Christening robe” often is a family heirloom used for generations. St. Paul tells us today in the letter to the Galatians: “all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:26). To be “clothed with Christ” just like our other clothing choices is also to make a personal statement: a profession of faith about a relationship and the values and lifestyle they point to. A case in point.

Earlier this year the world of professional baseball was startled by the story of Grant Desme a top prospect for the Oakland, California Athletics in their Arizona “A” franchise. Desme announced he was leaving professional baseball to pursue studies for the priesthood. Sidelined through much of the 2008 season by an injury, Desme, a life-long Catholic who grew up with a strong religious background said the injuries “were the biggest blessing God has ever given me. Baseball has always been my life, defined me... When baseball was taken away from me, it was a shock. I did some soul-searching of who I was and who I wanted to be, and this is where it’s led me. Last year (2009) I really had a strong feeling of a calling and a real strong desire to follow it. I just fought it. As an excuse I went into this year as a test, to see, just hoping and praying about it. As the year went on, God blessed me, I had a better year than I could have imagined (Desme hit 31 homers) but that reconfirmed my desire because I wasn’t at peace with where I was at.”

When I “Googled” Desme’s story, I also read some of the “Blog” postings. They revealed other clothing styles and choices. One said: “He’s not only an idiot, but he’s a stupid idiot. He can be a priest or whatever he wants to be when he’s done playing baseball.” Another wrote: “I’m not a religious person. ...The church is going to be his career, not baseball. Don’t put this guy down for something he believes is his path. So he doesn’t make a few million, maybe money doesn’t run his life like it does the rest of us celebrity wannabee, material consumers.”

Desme’s story brings us face-to-face with today’s gospel story. Peter’s profession of faith—“*You are the Christ of God*”—is his moment of choosing to be “clothed with Christ”. Jesus’ question to Peter, addressed to Grant Desme, is also addressed to each of us: “But *you*. Who do *you* say that I am?”

At our baptism we were clothed by our human and church family in our “Christening robe”—the life of faith, the life of Christ. But just as we grow older and our parents no longer make our physical clothing choices for us, at some point, each of us must decide what we are going to do with this “robe” of faith that has been handed down to us. Do we want to continue to “wear” and “grow” in it, or will we choose other “clothes”—other values and lifestyles?

No one can answer Jesus’ question to Peter and to each of us. No one else can offer our act of faith. Each of us has our heart to give freely away or not. No one can take our place. Only we can speak for ourselves. We must select *our* clothes. Jesus invites us to find our God-given identity in clothing ourselves in faith and hope as his disciples through loving service to others in his model; in daily acts of dying to self and rising to new or greater life in him—embracing the cross.

What clothes do we wear? What statement do they make?