

# NATIONAL BIBLE WEEK

NOVEMBER 14-21, 1982

A STUDY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FROM THE U. S. CENTER FOR THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL APOSTOLATE,  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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In its 1982 planning document, as approved by the general membership of the United States Catholic Conference in November 1981, the U. S. Center for the Catholic Biblical Apostolate through the USCC Department of Education was authorized to continue its National Bible Week observance book. This present document has been prepared by the Department of Education through the Director of the Biblical Apostolate, together with members of the National Conference of Diocesan Directors of Religious Education. It was approved by the Secretary for Education, Rev. Thomas G. Gallagher, and authorized for publication by the undersigned.

Monsignor Daniel F. Hoye  
General Secretary NCCB/USCC  
July 27, 1982

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# NATIONAL BIBLE WEEK

NOVEMBER 14-21, 1982

Motorists about to take a long journey over the complex network of roads and crossroads that stretch out endlessly in this vast country find reliable road maps indispensable for direction and for safe and comfortable travel in reaching their journey's end.

More important is the need of direction in making a safe journey through life, not in isolation but in the vast society of countless other individuals. In this journey, undertaken jointly by all the people of our land, the complexities of national life are heightened by the multi-national, multicultural character of the people, stemming from every nation under heaven yet formed into a single people under God called the United States of America. With vast differences of race and color, national unity might not have seemed possible were it not for that unifying reality binding together all of humanity, namely the image and likeness of God stamped upon the soul of each individual with its sense of dependence on a Supreme Being, and of responsibility to him for the conduct of one's life.

But the basic natural law is often obscured and variously interpreted, pointing to a need of revelation from the same Creator and Father of us all. In our predominantly Judaeo-Christian tradition we are not left without assistance from the Lord of the universe. He intervened in human existence to form a people called his own to receive, to preserve and to embody his divine directives, to record and to celebrate his saving deeds. All these culminated in the coming of his son-made-man. The person, life and redeeming mission of God's son was sealed forever by his sacrificial death and resurrection and the pouring out of his spirit to form a new and universal people under a new and eternal covenant.

The document of his covenant is the divinely inspired Scriptures called the Bible. The living understanding, interpretation and embodiment of this document was and continues to be entrusted to the community of believers called the church which Jesus founded and of which he is head and Lord. Thus the strongest unifying factor in the national life of the American people is that of religion and the free exercise of it. Thus understood, the Bible is God's word entrusted to the church to guide his people along the journey of life on earth in preparation for the fullness of life that is yet to come.

How appropriate then, that besides the perennial use of God's word, a time be set aside each year and dedicated by the American people to the deeper and clearer understanding of the saving value of God's word. Through the observance of annual National Bible Week the moral religious inheritance, which inspires and supports our life as a nation, is strengthened and directed to God and to the spiritual welfare of our country.

The Laymen's National Bible Committee, made up of leaders in business and a variety of professions, organizes and sponsors this annual interfaith activity which consists in a provocative and challenging television and radio spot campaign in addition to newspaper and magazine advertising. This aspect of the activity is aimed more directly at the unchurched and those scarcely or less familiar with reading and following the Bible teaching. Complementing this evangelistic phase of the activity is the combined effort of the churches designed to promote wider reading, study, prayerful reflection and application of the word of God to life, not only during Bible Week but throughout the year.

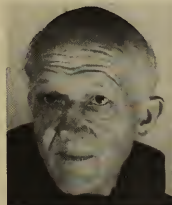
Though the general observance of National Bible Week takes place annually in the week in which Thanksgiving Day occurs, the Catholic community of our nation anticipates the observance by one week, allowing for fuller and longer participation, especially in schools. This year it will be NOVEMBER 14-21.

In this 1982 National Bible Week book a new approach is undertaken. The content consists of a series of presentations with points for reflection offered by a variety of writers in the fields of Bible science and catechetics. The series is concerned with an entire book—THE GOSPEL OF MARK, considered to be the first of the four written accounts that have been handed down.

The theme considered best to express the nature and purpose of Mark's account of the mission of Christ is: **PATHWAY TO GLORY THROUGH THE CROSS.** This is the key to understanding and acceptance of **THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD.**

*Fr. Stephen Hartdegen, O.F.M.*

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REV. STEPHEN HARTDEGEN, O.F.M.,  
Director of the U.S. Center for the  
Catholic Biblical Apostolate, and  
editor of this annual observance  
book celebrates fifty years of service  
to the Word this year as a priest. We  
salute him and pray for him: AD  
MULTOS ANNOS.





## THEME

### THE GOSPEL OF MARK: PATHWAY TO GLORY THROUGH THE CROSS

The theme for this year's National Bible Week celebration captures the underlying thread that weaves its way through the Marcan account of the Good News. As L. Schenke states in *Glory and the Way of the Cross—The Gospel of Mark* (p. 70):

The Gospel according to Mark presents "a theology of the cross. God has not willed to reveal himself in glorious deeds, but in the lowliness of the Cross of Jesus Christ. It is precisely in the deepest Godforsakenness of the cross (15:34) that God was directly present. Therefore, Jesus' sonship and heavenly glory can finally only be recognized in the event of the cross (15:39)."

It is quite possible that a reader might bypass Mark's account too easily, especially if the reader does not advert to the paradoxical aspects of Christianity which through the ages have captured the hearts and minds of so many men and women. This came home recently during the May televising of the life of Marco Polo. In one scene, Polo's father delivers gifts from the Pope to the Khan. The Khan examines them, picks up a golden cross, and says: "You Christians are an interesting people. You have turned an instrument of death into a thing of beauty." In its own way, that remark captures the goal that Mark set for himself as he tried to hand down the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to the Christian community.

In like manner, the attempt to capitalize on the paradoxical carries its own risks. Saint Paul tells us that for some, seeing a "pathway to glory through the cross" presents "a stumbling block to Jews, and an absurdity to Gentiles; but to those who are called . . . Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-25).

The celebration of National Bible Week this year invites us to reflect once again on the Good News of salvation, the Good News that God loves us. Henri Nouwen and his associates in their book *Compassion* provide us with a tremendous image for appreciating this love of God. They point out that the word "compassion" in Greek comes from the word for "entrails of the body, the guts," and in Hebrew from the word for "Womb of Yahweh" (p. 16). By plunging ourselves into this celebration, into this love, we immerse ourselves in the "guts, the womb" of the power and wisdom that enables us to keep the Marcan paradox alive, just as so many men and women before us have done in the course of the history of Christianity. Like those who have gone before us, we shall be enabled to bring life from death, light from darkness, hope from despair, peace from anxiety, freedom from slavery, love from hatred, strength from weakness, wisdom from folly. Mark's purpose in writing comes to fruition when men and women like ourselves can see receiving in the act of giving, being pardoned in the act of pardoning, and, finally, being born to life in the act of dying (Prayer of Saint Francis). Indeed, the Khan was right, and may he continue to be so: "You Christians

are interesting people. You have turned an instrument of death into a thing of beauty."

May our observance of National Bible Week under the theme of "Pathway to Glory through the Cross" enable many others around us to see and proclaim the same realization as our example leads them to embrace more fully the power and the wisdom who is our Lord Jesus.

FATHER THOMAS G. GALLAGHER Secretary for Education, USCC Department of Education; Representative for Catholic Schools.

## PARISH BIBLE SERVICE

The following ideas are offered to pastors and their staffs in preparing a parish celebration of National Bible Week, based on the format of a Bible service.

### RATIONALE

National Bible Week is an opportunity to bring the parish community together for a prayerful service that emphasizes the role of Sacred Scripture in their lives. Such a service has a catechetical dimension of instruction on the theme and a spiritual dimension of calling the faithful together for communal prayer. With careful planning, this event can greatly affect the parish community.

### THEME

The theme for National Bible Week 1982 "The Gospel of Mark—Pathway to Glory Through the Cross" is essential to the understanding of Mark's writings. This theme, based on the readings of Cycle B, is most appropriate for a parish Bible service because these are the readings currently used in Sunday liturgies. Readings and songs should be chosen to support the theme, and the homily should develop the theme as it applies to the lives and needs of the parishioners.

### PLANNING/SCHEDULE

The parish Bible service can be as elaborate or as simple as the local community wishes. Such an event could be a weekday evening service, a parish-wide rally, or it could be part of the parish celebration of the Thanksgiving holiday. It is imperative, however, that a planning group be established as early as September to plan and publicize this upcoming event as an important spiritual celebration for the entire parish family. Some parishes might choose to schedule this Bible service during National Bible Week (Nov. 14-21), or perhaps at a more appropriate time according to local needs. Other parishes may choose to use this Bible service within their adult catechesis session, the catechumenate programs, and/or parish prayer groups.

The planning group might investigate the possibility of structuring the Bible service as an ecumenical event. This would depend on previous interfaith activities and the nature of ecumenical relations in the local community. It might also be a good way to begin ecumenical collaboration.

## PUBLICITY SUGGESTIONS

- postcards to all parishioners
- bulletin announcements
- phone campaign through area contact involving persons in various sections of the parish
- involvement of parish groups: parish council, marriage encounter, Cursillo or charismatic renewal groups, school, religious education, youth, and other parish societies
- invitations to families
- local newspaper article
- ecumenical involvement and cooperation
- use of the illustrations contained in this book for brochures, bulletins, etc.; these are easily reproduced for such purposes

## MUSIC

Music is essential to communal Bible celebration. The planning committee should select the style and type of music. In planning the service, it is highly desirable to have as much community participation as possible. If available, the parish choir, youth music group, or children's choir could be asked to participate. Some parishes have had success in inviting neighboring parish choirs to join in the service; other parishes sometimes choose to invite ecumenical participation in the music program for their celebration of National Bible Week.

## SUGGESTED BIBLE SERVICE

The Gospel of Mark: Pathway to Glory Through the Cross

### OPENING HYMN

A hymn appropriate to the theme.

### GREETING

#### **Presiding Minister:**

The grace and peace of God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

#### **Assembly:**

And also with you.

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Theme Statement (read by a commentator)

Jesus gave us a message that forms the basis of our way of life. We come together as a community of believers, in that message and in Jesus Himself, in order to find strength in struggling with the daily tensions of living that message. We sing, we reflect, we pray, we learn, and we trust that our lives will be based on the message of the Gospel of Mark, that the pathway to glory is through the cross.

### ENTHRONEMENT OF THE WORD

It is strongly recommended that the Bible be enthroned at the beginning of the service in a prominent place in the

sanctuary. The enthronement could involve a short procession with candles, incense to reverence the Scriptures, or flowers to enhance the Bible stand or place where the enthronement occurs. The commentator should explain the meaning and propriety of enthroning Scripture.

### OPENING PRAYER:

#### **Presiding Minister:**

Let us pray. (Pause for silent prayer.)

Almighty and ever living God,  
our source of power and inspiration,  
give us joy in serving you and in sharing our gifts with others,

and strengthen us on our pathway to glory through the cross as followers of Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

#### **Assembly:**

Amen.

### READING:

Isaiah 53:10-12 (Lectionary #147) or  
1 Corinthians 12:4-13 (Lectionary #764-9)

### PSALM RESPONSE

(Sung if possible; cf. *Cantor Book - Cycle 13*, WLP Publications or *The Gelineau Gradual*, GIA Publications)

Psalm 116, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9 (Lectionary #132)

R/. I will walk in the presence of the Lord,  
in the land of the living.

**I love the Lord because he has heard  
my voice in supplication,  
Because he has inclined his ear to me  
the day I called.**

R/. I will walk in the presence of the Lord,  
in the land of the living.

**The cords of death encompassed me;  
the snares of the netherworld seized  
upon me;**

**I fell into distress and sorrow,  
And I called upon the name of the Lord,  
"O Lord, save my life!"**

R/. I will walk in the presence of the Lord,  
in the land of the living.

**Gracious is the Lord and just;  
yes, our God is merciful.**

**The Lord keeps the little ones;  
I was brought low, and he saved me.**

R/. I will walk in the presence of the Lord,  
in the land of the living.

**For he has freed my soul from death,  
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.  
I shall walk before the Lord  
in the lands of the living.**

R/. I will walk in the presence of the Lord,  
in the land of the living.

R/. Or: Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Mark 10:35-45 (Lectionary #147) or  
Mark 8:34-39 (Lectionary #339)

HOMILY

Possible Themes:

1. The paradox of Christianity: We must give to receive;
2. Each person has gifts to give;
3. The greatest is the one who serves;
4. The pathway to glory through the cross;
5. Role of suffering in the life of a believer;
6. The Gospel message as a counter-culture for our times.

INTERCESSIONS

**Presiding Minister:**

Gathered together in Christ as brothers and sisters, let us call to mind God's many blessings and ask him to hear the prayers that he inspires us to make.

**Deacon or Other Minister:**

1. For Pope John Paul II, our Bishop \_\_\_\_\_, and all religious leaders of our community, that God may strengthen them in their pathway to glory through the cross, we pray to the Lord. . .  
Lord, hear our prayer.
2. For evangelists, homilists, preachers, and catechists that they may live in the Spirit and share the truth, by what they say and do, we pray to the Lord. . .  
Lord, hear our prayer.
3. For the whole church, that all who bear the name of Christ might be dedicated to bringing the Gospel message to others by sharing the gifts and giving of themselves in the service of others, we pray to the Lord. . .  
Lord, hear our prayer.
4. For parents, that their love for God and for each other will build households of faith in which God's message of giving to others, the pathway to glory through the cross is lived, let us pray to the Lord. . .  
Lord, hear our prayer.
5. For all of us gathered in this holy place, in faith and love, that we may always be persons in whom the message of Mark takes root, let us pray to the Lord. . .  
Lord, hear our prayer.
6. (Other petitions may be added.)

**Presiding Minister:**

Father, you know the many different needs your people have in this life. Hear the prayers of all who believe in you. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

**Assembly:**

Amen.

SIGN OF PEACE

The presiding minister invites the assembly to share a greeting of peace, emphasizing the theme, "Pathway to Glory Through the Cross."

CLOSING HYMN

A hymn appropriate to the theme.

BENEDICTION

(Optional)

If the planning group wishes to have Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in addition to the Liturgy of the Word service, then it should follow the directives found in the Roman Ritual, "Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass" #93-100.

LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Another way to celebrate a parish Bible service is using the format of the Liturgy of the Hours. Depending on the time of day, such a celebration could be presented as Morning or Evening Prayer. Another alternative would be to construct the Bible service according to the Office of Readings:

- Opening Verses
- Hymn
- Psalmody
- Readings  
—Biblical Reading  
—Non-biblical Reading
- Te Deum or Other Hymn
- Concluding Hymn
- Dismissal

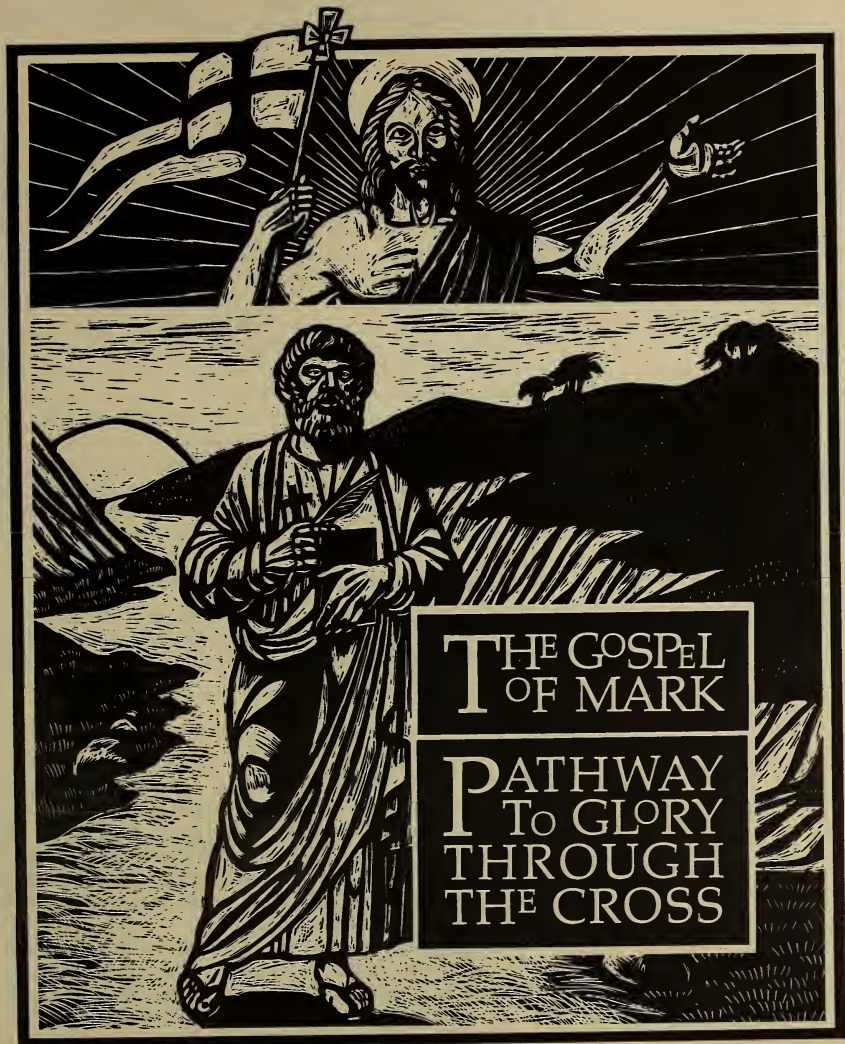
FOLLOW-UP

It is suggested that each participant in the parish celebration be given a small memento of this event, perhaps an inexpensive copy of the New Testament or the Book of Psalms. The American Bible Society can provide attractive biblical holy cards that would also make appropriate gifts.

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FATHER DAVID BEEBE Campus Minister, Glassboro State College, N.J.; Former Executive Secretary, National Conference of Diocesan Directors of Religious Education.





THE GOSPEL  
OF MARK

PATHWAY  
TO GLORY  
THROUGH  
THE CROSS

# PROLOGUE OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

(MARK 1:1-13)



## REPARATION FOR THE MINISTRY OF JESUS (1:1)

The Gospel of Mark is not a biography in the usual sense. It is an account of the ministry of Jesus with a structure peculiarly its own. In the form of a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, Jesus accomplishes his mission of salvation to mankind that ends in his death and resurrection. It is the pathway to glory through the cross. The author thus presents a theological portrait of Jesus as the Christ (anointed One) and Son of God.

“Here begins the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). In this opening verse Mark expresses the nature (gospel, i.e., good news), the content (salvation), and the purpose of his writing: to show that Jesus is the Christ and the son of God. In his own person Jesus is the good news of salvation. He achieves the glorious triumph over the forces of evil through his death and resurrection. To be his follower is to believe in him, and to be ready to sacrifice, and even die for him (8:35; 10:29; 16:16).

## MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (1:2-8)

The ministry of John is the prelude to God’s salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ. Verses 2 and 3 present the Baptist’s ministry as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah.

- 2 “I send my messenger before you  
to prepare your way;
- 3 “a herald’s voice in the desert, crying,  
‘Make ready the way of the Lord,  
clear him a straight path.’”

In reality Mark 1:2 alludes to Malachi 3:1 in which the Lord of hosts sends his messenger before him to prepare his way. The name of the messenger is Elijah (Malachi 3:23). How is it then that Mark 1:4 calls the messenger John the Baptist. Christian tradition has regarded John as the true precursor of Christ. He accomplished his mission in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:16-17).

John the Baptist will have the zeal and energy of Elijah to defend the right. He will fulfill a role of appeasement and reconciliation through his fidelity to God and thus prepare a people for the Lord. In Mark 9:13 and Matthew 17:10-13, Jesus speaks of Elijah as having already come in the person of John the Baptist.

### REFLECTIONS

*What portrait of Jesus does the Gospel of Mark present?*

*How can it be considered good news?*

*Explain the name Jesus Christ.*

*Why does Mark use the title Son of God only at the beginning and end of the Gospel?*

*What moves you to be a follower of Jesus, and what does it involve?*



Mark 1:3, alluding to Isaiah 40:3, understands the voice that cries in the desert to be that of John the Baptist, who prepares the way for Jesus, referred to as Lord, thus indirectly affirming his divinity.

Mark 1:4-8. Following the life style of Elijah, John the Baptist, by his spirit and austere life, prepares the people for “the day of the Lord” (See Malachi 3:23-24). They come to John to be baptized “as they confess their sins.” John’s baptism with water was a sign of willingness on the part of adult sinners of the Jewish world to reform their lives. It inspired the people to dispositions of humility and purity of heart. Thus John fulfilled through his baptism the providential role of preparing privileged souls, especially those destined to become the first followers and apostles of Jesus (John 1:29-34) to hear Jesus themselves and to recognize him as the expected Messiah. John’s baptism did not impart forgiveness of sin (cf. Matthew 3:11). That was reserved to Jesus. Of him John said:

“One mightier than I is to come after me. I am not fit to stoop and untie his sandal” (v. 7).

This was John’s response to those who inquired about the meaning of what he was doing (Luke 3:15; John 1:19) and whether or not he was the Messiah. This truly humble acknowledgment of his identity expresses John’s relationship of herald or forerunner of Christ. The power and might to be manifested by Christ was prophesied long before (Isaiah 9:6; 49:25; 53:12). The lowliness of John’s position enhances the exalted moral stature of Christ and the character of his mission.

“I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit” (v. 8).

Baptism in the Holy Spirit refers to the purifying, sanctifying and strengthening action of the Spirit foretold for messianic times (Isaiah 44:3; Joel 3:1; Zechariah 12:10; 13:1).

### **BAPTISM OF JESUS** (vv. 9-11)

“During that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. Immediately on coming up out of the water he saw the sky rent in two and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. Then a voice came from the heavens: “You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests.”

These verses bring the introductory part of Mark’s Gospel to a climax. They indicate the confirmation of John’s mission just fulfilled, and of Jesus’ mission about to begin. The precise account of Mark gives the reader to understand that Jesus is the Messiah who will baptize in the Holy Spirit (v. 8). As Jesus comes up out of the Jordan, he is invested with the Holy Spirit and acknowledged by the voice from heaven as the “Son of God” (See Mark 1:1).

While the other evangelists describe the appearance of the dove and the audible sound of the voice from heaven as a theophany seen and heard by the bystanders, Mark tells of it only as experienced by Jesus, having in mind perhaps the faith of the early Christian community in the anointing of Jesus by the “Spirit as Messiah and Son of God” and in Christian baptism inaugurated by Christ.

*Compare the persons and missions of Elijah (1 Kings 17-19) and John the Baptist (Mark 1:1-11; Luke 1:13-17; 3:2-22; Mark 6:14-29).*

*Explain the difference between John’s baptism with water and the baptism of Jesus with its effects.*

*Why did Jesus submit to John’s baptism when he would institute a superior baptism?*

"The sky rent in two" alludes to an eruption of the divine in human affairs. Isaiah 63:19 expresses the psalmist's plea, "O, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you." The descent of the Spirit is reminiscent of his action in forming a new people at Sinai after the Exodus (Exodus 19:9, 16-17, 20; Isaiah 63:11, 14). The form of a dove assumed by the Holy Spirit coming on Jesus portrays Jesus as initiator of a new people alluded to by Psalms 68:14 and 74:19. St. Paul regards the Spirit of Yahweh guiding the Israelites through the Red Sea as a symbol of baptism (1 Corinthians 10:1). In Isaiah 11:2, the Spirit is the gift of the Messiah; in Isaiah 42:1, the Spirit of Yahweh is placed on his servant called "my chosen one," seen in Mark 1:11 to mean "the Son of God."

The voice from heaven whence came the Spirit is the voice of God. "You are my beloved Son" (cf. Psalms 2:7) understood by the evangelist in the real sense of firstborn and only son toward whom the Father has a tender love and in whom he takes his delight. Thus, the way of Jesus as Messiah and son of God is outlined in the beginning of his messianic activity.

### THE TEMPTATION (vv. 12-13)

"At that point the Spirit sent him out toward the desert. He stayed in the wasteland forty days, put to the test there by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and angels waited on him."

In his account of Christ's baptism, Mark portrays the glorious aspect of Christ in his person and mission. And now by way of abrupt transition he presents the phase that foreshadows the cross. Mark sets the stage for the trial of Christ in concrete terms of place, nature of temptation and name of the tempter.

The same Holy Spirit who descended on Jesus at his baptism now "sends him out toward the desert" of Judea (v. 4), the mountainous region between Jerusalem to the west and the Jordan Valley to the east. The place indicated by tradition is Gebel Qarantal or the Mount of Temptation, northwest of Jericho, high above the Dead Sea and far from human traffic. He was with wild beasts yet was in contact with the world of spirits, Satan who would tempt him, and the angels who would wait on him. The desert is a place to meet God and to pray (cf. Hosea 2:16), a place for penance and trial. As Scripture attests, it is also a place where Satan wanders (Isaiah 13:21; Tobit 8:3; Matthew 12:43; Luke 11:24). It was in the desert that Israel was formed into a people and where God tested their fidelity (cf. Deuteronomy 8:2-6). It was there also that they tempted God in demanding wonders and signs (Psalms 95:8-10).

The forty days are reminiscent of Israel's forty years of wandering in the desert (Exodus 16:35), of Moses' stay on the mountain (Exodus 24:18) in prayer and fasting (Exodus 34:28), and of Elijah's walk of forty days to Mt. Horeb, ancient scene of God's covenant with Israel through his servant Moses.

Mark does not specify the nature of the temptations of Jesus but he does indicate frequent encounters with the powers of evil; recall the many exorcisms Jesus performs in his public ministry (3:22-27).

*How can John's words concerning himself and Christ be followed in your life: "He must increase while I must decrease" (John 3:30)?*

*What was the role of the Spirit in Jesus' life and what is it in your life?*

The presence of the wild beasts who did Jesus no harm bespeaks the order and tranquility and peace with natural creation, a victory predicted for the messianic age (Isaiah 11:1-9). The ministry of angels (v. 13) indicates the altogether singular assistance provided by God to his chosen one who triumphs over hunger, temptation and every other hostile power.

Since the Gospel narratives of Matthew and Luke record three distinct temptations, many authors understand them in the sense of their relation to Christ's mission as Messiah. The temptation consisted of Christ making a choice between following the proposal of Satan and becoming a Messiah according to the worldly and popular notions of the Jewish people, or the opposite, following the way of humility, sorrow and suffering willed by the Father. Jesus chose resolutely to do his Father's will and to reject forcefully Satan himself and all other opponents of the mission his Father entrusted to him.

After Peter's confession concerning the identity of Christ, Jesus spoke of his impending passion. Peter opposed the notion of suffering and was sharply rebuked by Jesus as an adversary (8:33). See also Mark 8:11; Matthew 12:38 and Luke 11:16, 29.

The hostilities against Jesus during his ministry continued with ever greater force, resulting in his arrest, trial, condemnation, crucifixion and death. This specious victory of the powers of evil was in reality the hour of supreme triumph of Jesus over sin and death through his resurrection and entrance into glory (Hebrews 2:14-18).

THE WAY OF THE CROSS became for Christ and for all who wish to follow him the true PATHWAY TO ETERNAL GLORY.

*How does Christ's victory over the powers of evil help you in your trials?*

*What was Christ's method in dealing with Satan and with all his adversaries?*

*Since discipleship of Christ along the path of life requires carrying your cross to attain glory, what dispositions will be most advantageous in realizing this goal?*

# THE MYSTERY OF THE MESSIAH: JESUS AND THE PEOPLE

(MARK 1:14-3:6)

## REFLECTIONS

*Recall some significant moments in your life when you heard the proclamation of the Kingdom and responded in faith.*

*Think of some of the conditions in our land which might be obstacles to repenting, reforming and believing.*

*What are some of the things we can do to overcome those obstacles?*

*Through Baptism each of us is called to discipleship, to be a follower of Jesus. What are some of the values and actions in people's lives that indicate they are disciples of the Lord?*

*How can people tell that I am a disciple of the Lord?*

*When we share our journey in faith with others how are they affected?*

*When I attempt to teach others about the Christian message, do I do so convincingly or not? Why? Or why not?*



**REACHING THE KINGDOM (1:14-15)** Verses 14 and 15 link the spiritual (both ritual and ascetic) preparation of Jesus, through his baptism and sojourn in the desert, with the first stage of his ministry in Galilee. Mark implies that it was the arrest of John the Baptist that prompted Jesus to go north to Galilee and begin to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom.

Jesus proclaimed by word and deed that the long-awaited Kingdom of God was at hand. It is present in him and in his ministry. With the coming of the Kingdom all people are called to respond to this revelation in faith by repenting, reforming and believing.

## THE CALL OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES (1:16-20)

This was not the first time that Simon and Andrew had met Jesus. John tells us that two disciples of John the Baptist followed Jesus after John had pointed him out as the Lamb of God. One of those disciples was Andrew who immediately went to his brother Simon and told him "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41). Simon went to see Jesus who changed his name to Peter. Then Jesus called Peter and Andrew to abandon their fishing nets and follow him totally, promising that he would make them "fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). They immediately responded to the call to discipleship.

As Jesus and the two disciples walked along the seashore they saw James and John in their boat mending their nets. Again, Jesus called them and immediately they left their father Zebedee, their nets, and followed Jesus.

## THE SYNAGOGUE AT CAPERNAUM (1:21-22)

In verses 21 and 22 Mark does not tell us what Jesus taught in the synagogue at Capernaum. Instead he tells us of the authority with which Jesus taught. Jesus speaks as a prophet, and does not resort to a variety of rabbinic traditions as the scribes might have done. Rather, Jesus teaches with authority and power that amazes the people. They are held spellbound.

## THE CURE OF THE DEMONIAK (1:23-28)

As Jesus was teaching in the synagogue a man possessed by a demon appeared. The unclean spirit shouted to Jesus by his name





and the town from which he came. When the unclean spirit called Jesus “the holy One of God” (Mark 1:24), Jesus told the spirit to be quiet and to come out of the man. The spirit left shouting and convulsing the man. The people immediately connected what they had witnessed with the new teaching of Jesus, and with his authority. The news of Jesus’ teaching and his power was spread quickly.

### AN EVENING OF HEALING (1:29-34)

When Jesus and the four disciples left the synagogue they went to the home of Simon and Andrew. Many commentators believe that the house became a headquarters when Jesus was in Galilee. When Jesus was told about the fever from which Peter’s mother-in-law was suffering, he grasped her hand and she was immediately cured. Since fever usually leaves one exhausted and weak, the fact that Peter’s mother-in-law immediately began to serve her guests attests to the completeness of the cure.

In the evening, after sundown, many people were brought to Jesus to be cured. Mark distinguishes between people who had a variety of illnesses, and those who were possessed by demons. Again, Jesus forbade the demons to speak. As always Jesus responded compassionately to those with human needs.

*In today’s world demon-possession is frequently looked upon with skepticism. What are some evidences in the 20th century world which point to the existence of evil spirits?*

*Each of us needs to rely on Jesus to expunge the demons within us. Apply this to yourself.*

*There is a great deal of healing that is needed in our worlds of home, work, neighborhoods, etc. Everyone is in need of healing one way or another. How do I follow Jesus as healer in my home, at work, in my neighborhood?*

*Frequently, it is easier to do things for others than to allow others to do things for us.*

*How do I respond to another person’s attempt to heal me?*

*Many of us have hectic and frenzied schedules, but Jesus points out to us the need for solitude and prayer even in the midst of the world's acclaim.*

*How do I provide for solitude in my life?*

*What efforts do I make to deepen my prayer life? What further efforts should I make?*

### **THE NEED FOR SOLITUDE AND PRAYER (1:35-39)**

Early the following morning Jesus felt the need for solitude and communion with the Father in prayer. When the others found that he had gone off, they went to find him. When they found Jesus, they told him that the people of Capernaum were looking for him. Jesus, however, had no intention of being monopolized in Capernaum. Other villages were also in need of having the good news proclaimed there. Mark tells us that Jesus then went throughout Galilee preaching the good news in the synagogues and exorcising demons.

### **THE CURE OF A LEPER (1:40-45)**

We are not told how a leper found out about Jesus, but we are told that he approached Jesus with faith, convinced that if Jesus chose to do so he could cure him. Again Mark highlights Jesus' compassion and tells us that he was "moved with pity" (Mark 1:41). Jesus spoke and instantly the cure was accomplished. It must have surprised the cured leper when Jesus told him not to tell anyone about the cure, but Jesus wanted to go about his preaching without emphasizing his messianic office. Jesus did tell the leper to go through the required ritual of presenting himself to the priest. Overcome by human joy, the leper did not keep his cure a secret, but publicized it. In doing so he made it harder for Jesus to minister. Even though Jesus stayed away from the towns, the people kept coming to him.

*In most of the healing that Jesus did, faith seems to be a prerequisite.*

*When I am in need of healing, both physically and spiritually to what degree do I have faith and trust in Jesus' love for me and his power and authority to cure me?*

### **THE CURE OF THE PARALYTIC (2:1-12)**

When the people heard that Jesus had returned to Capernaum, they flocked to see and hear him. The crowd was so great that no one could get through the door. The ingenuity of a paralyzed man's friends prompted them to take him on his mat to the roof, remove the mud thatch and branches, and lower the man on his mat through the hole in the roof. When Jesus saw their trust in him to cure the man, instead of an instant cure, he forgave the man's sins. Never before had any prophet attempted to forgive sins. Immediately the scribes began to question this action, not openly, but "asking themselves." They accused him of blasphemy (2:6). Jesus knew their thoughts and challenged them by asking a question. Is it easier to forgive sin or to cure a man? In the Jewish world physical infirmity was connected with sin. To show his power and authority to forgive sin, Jesus physically cured the man. This was only the beginning of the conflict between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees.

*Jesus confronts the forces of evil in his world head on. In this incident he confronts sin, infirmity and his accusers. What are some of the forces of evil in our 20th century world which must be confronted?*

*How often do I pray that injustices, hunger, etc. be overcome? How often do I act?*

### **THE CALL OF LEVI (2:13-17)**

When Matthew tells this story (Matthew 9:10-13), he uses the name of "Matthew" rather than "Levi." It is likely that Matthew and Levi are the same person, since Mark uses the name "Matthew" rather than "Levi" when listing the apostles. Again when Jesus called Levi, he like the others immediately responded to the call. Apparently Levi invited Jesus and the disciples to his home for dinner. Other guests included tax collectors and sinners (those who did not observe the

*There is a bit of the scribes and Pharisees in each of us. Do I look down on people who are different or do I value the dignity of every human being?*

*How do I express this in my life?*

minute rules of the Pharisees). Rather than challenge Jesus, the scribes questioned the disciples. They could not understand why Jesus would eat with such people. Overhearing them, Jesus alluded to a proverb that sick rather than healthy people need a doctor. Jesus then said that he came to call sinners—they are capable of repentance. Those who are self-righteous have no spiritual needs.

*Read the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14. Reflect on self-righteousness vs. humility and apply your reflection to your own life.*

### **THE QUESTION OF FASTING (2:18-22)**

To the disciples of John and to the Pharisees fasting was a very important element for people living religious lives. Apparently the disciples of Jesus were not observing such a practice. Objecting to this, the people wanted to know why. Jesus likened his companionship with his disciples to a wedding feast. As long as the groom was with them there was no need to fast. When the groom was taken away (the first hint of Jesus' passion), they will fast.

Jesus then pointed out that the good news he was proclaiming was a new way. One should not attempt to explain the new in terms of the old no more than put new patches on old clothing or new wine in old wineskins. Jesus' proclamation of the good news called for new behavior and new thinking.

*What are some characteristic behaviors of a follower of Jesus? Reflect on these and apply them to your life.*

*What is some characteristic thinking of a follower of Christ? Reflect on this and apply to your life.*

### **THE DISCIPLES AND THE SABBATH (2:23-28)**

The Pharisees had questioned Jesus' eating with tax collectors and sinners and the lack of fasting by his disciples, now they question the behavior of the disciples on the Sabbath. As Jesus walked through fields of grain, his disciples plucked the grain. The Pharisees saw this as reaping (working) which was forbidden on the Sabbath. Jesus then reminded them of an event in the life of David. Once when David and his men were fleeing from Saul, David went to the high priest and asked for bread. There was no bread except holy bread which only the priests were permitted to eat. Not only David but also his men were allowed to eat the holy bread by the high priest. The incident ends with an aphorism on the relative importance of human beings and human observances. Since the Sabbath has been given for the benefit of human beings, it is a gift of God, not a burden.

*This incident in Mark highlights the letter of the law versus the spirit of the law. Think of incidents in your life when the letter of the law was observed to the detriment of the spirit of the law. Also think of times when the spirit of the law outweighed the letter of the law. Which were more freeing? Why?*

### **THE PLOT TO PUT HIM TO DEATH (3:1-6)**

The confrontation with the religious authorities continues, again in connection with the Sabbath. When they see the man with a withered hand, they hope that Jesus will heal him so that they can accuse him of breaking the Sabbath. Jesus brought the man forward and asked if it was better to do good on the Sabbath or evil, to save a life, or destroy it? No one answered. The question posed a dilemma for them. Jesus knew that the authorities had already closed their minds, that they were hard of heart. Jesus then cured the man knowing full well that in doing so he would bring about the final break with authorities. In the final verse of this section of Mark, the Pharisees immediately joined forces with their enemies, the irreligious Herodians, and began to plot how Jesus might be put to death.

*Reflect on the times in your life when living the Christian message brought you in conflict with other people; times when you acted in a Christian way knowing full well that you would alienate yourself from others by doing so. What enabled you to do this?*

# THE MYSTERY OF THE MESSIAH: JESUS AND HIS RELATIVES

(MARK 3:7-6:6)



## ESUS' HEALINGS AND EXORCISMS

(3:7-12) Mark begins this section of his Gospel with one of the several summary statements that he employs to help guide the development of the story.

In verses 8 and 9, Mark names the various regions from which people came to see Jesus. He uses this technique both to indicate Jesus' popularity at the height of his Galilean ministry, and to suggest his universal appeal. The verses also serve to set the stage for the creation of the new Israel with the establishment of the Twelve in the following passage.

The concluding verses of the summary (11 and 12) depict unclean spirits approaching Jesus and shouting out their knowledge of his true identity. In this incident, as elsewhere in the Gospel, the evil spirits immediately recognize Jesus while the understanding of the disciples remains cloudy. Moreover, Jesus seeks to silence the spirits from divulging who he is. What are we to make of this?

In one sense, of course, the presumed supernatural nature of demons may explain their superior abilities to know Jesus' identity. In another sense, however, it is not surprising that evil quickly reacts to the presence of good. There is something about the dark side—the sinful side—of human nature that vigorously reacts when confronted with virtue. Who has not felt the pangs of resentment or jealousy when in the presence of a virtuous person. The evil that lies within us—like the demons in the possessed—can quickly rush to the surface when goodness approaches.

Jesus' silencing of the demons is explained by his desire to retain control over how he was to become known. Jesus knew that his full identity could not be grasped until after he had been raised from the dead. Moreover, he was careful not to allow others to draw wrong conclusions about the nature of this mission. He wished to avoid being identified with the popular notion of Messiah that was prevalent in Israel at the time.

## REFLECTIONS

*What may be some of our personal "demons" and some of the "demons" in society that manifest themselves in the presence of good? In what ways do they manifest themselves?*

*These "demons" need to be expunged, just as Jesus drove the "demons" out in his day. In what ways can we eliminate or, at least, better control the "demons" that lurk in our lives or exist in our society?*

## CHOOSING THE TWELVE (3:13-19)

Mark presents us with a fairly straightforward—though sparse—account of the selection of the Twelve. There is no description of how the various individuals were chosen. But Mark does not leave us



without some interesting information about the Twelve. For instance, Mark informs us that Jesus gave James and John the name, Boanerges, or "Sons of Thunder." This may be a reflection on their tempestuous personalities, or it may refer to their being twins, since at that time, there was a prevailing superstition about twins and thunderstorms.

Mark also tells us that Jesus chose, as one of the Twelve, Simon, of the Zealot party. The Zealots of Jesus' day were a highly nationalistic group dedicated to the overthrow of the Roman domination, often with the use of terrorism. The fact that Jesus, who, himself, forsook the use of force, would harbor in his most intimate company one identified as a Zealot is startling. When one considers that Jesus also included in this select group the person that would eventually betray him, the Twelve take on a much different image than that pious group commonly depicted in religious art.

In Mark's account of the selection of the Twelve, it is clearly Jesus who chooses. It is not we who decide to be his disciples; it is he who chooses us. It is noteworthy, too, that Jesus chose the Twelve as companions as well as those whom he would send out. Too frequently, we Christians tend to be blinded to his human needs and wants by our faith in his divinity. This passage reminds us that the Twelve were important to Jesus—not only as those who served him in his ministry, but as true friends that he cherished.

In 3:14 and 15, Jesus gave the Twelve the task of preaching the Good News and of casting out demons (the work of establishing God's Kingdom).

### JESUS IS REJECTED BY HIS FAMILY (3:20-21)

Jesus' family (relatives, acquaintances) regarded him as mad and wished to take him away. He was obviously becoming some kind of an embarrassment to them. It was obvious, too, that his own people were not among his following.

The attitude of Jesus' own family must have caused him great pain. Yet, despite their rejection, he persisted in his calling. He considered his work from God to transcend his family loyalties. We see this attitude explicated a little later in verse 35.

As followers of Jesus, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that we may become an embarrassment to those we love and who love us. Indeed, it is conceivable that at some future time, Christians may be seen by the majority of society as being foolish or mad.

As we attempt to live the Gospel, our lifestyle may be called into question. "Why do they live the way they do?" people may begin to wonder of us.

*As disciples of Jesus, we, too, bear the responsibility for preaching the "good news" and of casting out "demons." How, in our lives, are we carrying out this responsibility? In what ways do we preach and cast out "demons" for the needs of our times?*

*Jesus showed great inclusiveness in choosing the Twelve. As was previously mentioned, besides Peter and the other well-known apostles, there is Simon, the Zealot, and Judas, who betrays Jesus. Do we take a similar attitude of inclusiveness, or do we tend to exclude those who don't readily fit into our pattern of friends and acquaintances. For example, do we exclude those who are poor or socially undesirable from the sphere in which we live our faith? How can we insure that we are being inclusive rather than exclusive?*

*How might we be seen as foolish or mad by others for retaining belief in Jesus and a commitment to the Church? Have you personally experienced such a reaction? How did it make you feel? How do you think Jesus felt by the reaction of his family and friends?*

*It is comforting to be able to identify ourselves with Jesus as the one who is being ridiculed. But, sometimes, are we not among the family members who see madness in others for their commitment to their beliefs? Have you considered others foolish who have had a strong commitment with which you could not identify? Who were they? What made you think that their commitment was foolish? What kind of attitude from us would be more appropriate—more in keeping with the Gospel?*

**JESUS' VICTORY OVER THE EMPIRE OF SATAN (3:22-27)**

Right on the heels of Jesus' rejection by his family, Mark presents certain scribes who dismissed Jesus as being possessed by the devil. But Jesus parried their contention with a response of flawless logic. "If he is casting out Satan," he asked, "how can he then be of Satan?" The latter's house would be divided and fall.

Mark concludes this passage with a comment by Jesus about how Satan, like a strong man, had to be bound if his house was to be entered. Jesus presented himself as the one who was binding the evil one and breaking down his house. Jesus clearly was no ally of Satan.

**BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE SPIRIT (3:28-30)**

Jesus, here, began a pronouncement with the word "Amen," meaning truly, or I give you my word. This expression appears thirteen times in Mark and always precedes a solemn statement. In this instance, Jesus' solemn statement was about blaspheming the Holy Spirit. The passage has always presented problems of interpretation because God's forgiveness knows no restrictions. The basic message here seems to be that in some situations the sinner can cut himself or herself off from God's forgiveness, either by denying the need for forgiveness or through particularly malicious intent. In either case, however, God's forgiveness is always available if the sinner but chooses to seek it.

**THE TRUE FAMILY OF JESUS (3:31-35)**

Jesus was told that his mother, brothers and sisters were seeking him. He responded by saying that those who do the will of God were his mother, brothers and sisters. In so doing, Jesus was emphasizing that commitment to God transcended family ties. Our true family is that one that binds us together as God's children. God has first claim on our loyalty. Thus, our earthly families should not interfere with our commitment to God, but, instead, help support and enhance it.

**TEACHING IN PARABLES (4:1-20)**

In verses 1-9, Jesus presented the parable of the seed. It could more accurately be termed the parable of the four soils, since it deals with the effects of four different kinds of soil for planting seed. In the parable, the yield of the good soil was extraordinary. A harvest of twenty-fold was considered to be very good in Jesus' time. Thus, the parable makes a dramatic claim about the prodigious nature of God's Kingdom which is coming.

In verses 10-12, we have another difficult passage. Jesus seemed to be saying that he didn't want some people to understand his message and, hence, be saved. However, Jesus was simply making an assertion that faith is a prerequisite for understanding the Gospel. To those without faith, his message is all riddles (parables).

*How can we make our family more of a faith-enhancing experience—one that points to our true family identity with God?*

*What does this saying of Jesus suggest about our commitment to others who share the faith with us? Does it say anything about our commitment to those who are not of our faith but share the common childhood of God?*

The source of explanation for the parable of the seed (verses 13-20) seems to be the early Church. In the early Church, the term "Word" extensively was used to designate Jesus' teaching. Also, the parable served as an allegory for explaining the various reasons why some Christians were beginning to fall away from the faith (anxieties, desire for wealth, persecution, etc.).

Many of these same conditions exist today, and are still instrumental in causing believers to abandon the faith.

### **FURTHER TEACHINGS (4:21-34)**

Jesus told his listeners that eventually all the mysteries of the Kingdom would be manifest. As a lamp was meant to give light, so, too, would his teaching illuminate people's hearts and minds.

Another parable dealing with seed follows in verses 4:26-34. It is a parable about the Kingdom of God. Just as the mustard seed is transformed from a small entity to a large bush, so, too, the Kingdom of God would grow from humble beginnings to a full, splendid reality.

### **FOUR MIRACLES (4:35-5:43)**

The first of the four miracles concerns Jesus' calming the sea and wind. Asleep in the boat at the time a storm occurs, Jesus was aroused by his frightened disciples. He stopped the storm, but rebuked his disciples for their lack of faith. The story is intended to comment on Jesus' lordship over nature. But a second, important message is that faith is needed in troubled times; fear is useless. We will see this formula again later when Jesus was asked to come to the assistance of Jairus' daughter.

Mark's use of the present tense in verse 41 for the word "obey" is to indicate that Jesus remains Lord of the Church and is able to save it from threatening turbulence.

### **CURING OF A DEMONIAC (5:1-20)**

In the curing of the Garasene demoniac, Jesus was reaching out to the Gentiles. This is indicated by the allusion to a nearby swine herd. Jews did not keep swine. The cure of the demoniac is unique in that Jesus did not enjoin him to refrain from telling others about his cure. Quite the contrary, Jesus asked that he go home and tell his family how much the Lord had done for him.

The incident of the drowning swine is intriguing. Evil spirits were seen to prefer certain dwelling spots and thought to become disturbed if they were dislodged from them. Hence, their request to Jesus for another location outside the possessed man.

An explanation offered for the destruction of the swine is that evil is self-destructive. The fact that swine were seen as unclean animals by Jews probably has some relevance here. Once again, Jesus is presented as having power over the kingdom of Satan, replacing it with the Kingdom of God.

*How would you rate the condition of your own "personal soil" for hearing God's Word and retaining it? What concerns, problems, etc., seem to pose the greatest threat to your faith?*

*What conditions exist in our society that militate against faith in Jesus? How would you give a modern interpretation of the parable using these conditions?*

*What are the threats today to Christian belief and to the Church? The power of Christ is manifested today through his followers. In what ways might we, with his power, calm these threats?*

*Most of us have experienced storms in our lives that Jesus has calmed. Recall some turbulence in your past life where your faith in Jesus was instrumental in bringing about a calming effect.*







One interesting parallel has to do with the swineherds. At Jesus' birth, it was the Jewish shepherds who announced his coming; at this incident, in Gentile land, it was the swineherds who proclaimed the good news of what happened.

In verses 5:21-43, Mark places a miracle within a miracle. The passage begins with a request by Jairus for Jesus to come to his house and cure his daughter. On the way, Jesus was approached secretly by a woman with a hemorrhage who succeeded in gaining a cure. The woman's surreptitious behavior may be explained by the fact that her illness was in the nature of a menstrual flow. According to Jewish law, she would have been classified as unclean and, therefore, unwilling to approach Jesus openly.

The power (*dynamis*) that leaves Jesus was the power to do the work of the Kingdom. Jesus attributed the cure to the woman's faith. In effect, she was presented to us in the Gospel as a model for access to Christ in faith. It is also faith that activates the power for doing God's work.

Following the woman's cure, Mark resumes his narrative about Jairus' daughter. Messengers from Jairus' house came and reported that the daughter had died. They suggested that there was, therefore, no longer a need for Jesus to come. Mark tells us that Jesus disregarded the report, emphasizing the need for faith (v. 36).

When Jesus arrived at the house, he discovered that the death mourning had begun. When he informed the mourners that the daughter was not dead, they scorned him. Once again, he was rejected. Undaunted, however, he went to the girl with Peter, James and John, and the girl's parents. He took her by the hand and either miraculously cured her or raised her from the dead (Mark is ambiguous on this point). In any case, Jesus once again told the witnesses not to divulge what he had done.

## JESUS' REJECTION AT NAZARETH (6:1-6)

Jesus now returned to his home territory. Though we are told by Mark that he kept his large audiences amazed, he was essentially rejected by his own friends and associates. What we see in Mark is the contrast between the strangers who accepted Jesus and those who knew him well, yet rejected him.

The rejection by Jesus' own, however, is not without understanding. These people knew Jesus in his home setting, perhaps as a boy. They knew his humble origins. Now, he came back as a teacher, speaking with authority, and asking them to believe in his words. Undoubtedly, many of his friends and relatives considered him presumptuous, ill-trained, and wrongly cast for the role of a prophet or teacher.

Unfortunately, however, because of their lack of faith, Jesus could work few miracles among them. His rejection by his own is symbolic of the greater and final rejection he would later experience by Israel.

*What power is needed to do God's work today? For example, is it the power to heal? to bring peace? to reconcile? In what ways does God's power need to be especially made present today?*

*What power have you felt that you have received from God in the past for doing the work of his kingdom? For example, is it the power of listening with insight and compassion? Or, perhaps, it has been the power to lead others. Reflect on what gifts (power) God has given you for doing his work.*

*Are we sometimes blinded to how God may be working through others because they do not conform to some preconceived notion of ours? What may be some of our blinders? Do such people have to come from a certain social status, or speak and act in certain ways before we begin to take them seriously?*

*Who might be the voices of prophecy for our times? How can we remain open to discovering God's action in all persons that he may choose as his instruments?*

# THE MYSTERY OF THE MESSIAH: JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES

(MARK 6:8-8:30)



**T**HE MESSAGE OF MARK One of the obvious characteristics of our contemporary society is that we live in an age of consumerism. From all avenues of media communication we are told of the benefits and necessity of this or that product, or the urgency and wisdom of this or that purchase. We are convinced that life—our life—simply cannot continue unless we possess these advertised items. Another sign of consumerism in our times is that persons are judged as to their worth and usefulness according to how many possessions they have or how many things they have accumulated. Many of these products, purchases, or things are advertised in such a way as to infer that they themselves can ensure happiness for the owner, that one simply can't and shouldn't be without them in this earthly life of ours.

In many ways the time and place of today resembles the time and place of the first century, the time of Jesus. The timeless basic human drive for happiness yes, but most of the creative energy of the people of each of those times being frustratingly directed in the wrong places.

The Gospel message is as counter-culture today as it was then; the Gospel message is as applicable today as it was then. The Gospel of Mark was written for the Gentiles of Rome, that is, the non-Jews living outside of Palestine. As such it is again applicable to us, since most of us fit that description so well, non-Jews or Gentiles, living outside the geographic area of Palestine. Therefore, not only is Mark's message applicable to us because of a similarity in attitude of people of the times, but also because it was, in a certain sense, written for us Gentiles. In its timeless way the Message of Jesus through Mark is for now.

Mark sets his Gospel to address the question "Who is Jesus?" with the ultimate answer, Jesus is the incarnate Son of God, the Lord and Messiah. However, because he was writing for the Christians of Rome, he emphasizes the passion and death of Christ, the taking up of the cross, losing one's life to preserve it, the paradoxical challenge in leading a Gospel life. The theme for 1982 National Bible Week "The Gospel of Mark: Pathway to Glory through the Cross" reflects this message. The purpose of the Gospel of Mark is valid today as it was then—who is Jesus? He is the Messiah. Mark brings together the many aspects of the Christ-event, reflects on it in light of his times, and gives direction for Gospel living. His message is indeed a hope-filled challenge for us all. Just like our Roman forefathers we

need to examine if we, as individual persons, live with reality or choose to escape reality. The reality of the message of Mark is that the son of God has entered the world of humans, and the longed for Kingdom of God is a real possibility for all of us. The Kingdom of God is beginning to be a reality in our lives when we move away from a self-satisfying accumulation of things to a self-giving life for others, a pathway of glory through the cross.

### A MAN OF AUTHORITY (6:6-30)

These verses of chapter 6 deal with two significant episodes in the development of the Gospel tradition. The first is the sending or commissioning of the Twelve by Jesus, and the second is the narrative about the death of John the Baptist. Thread of continuity can be found if we return to the major themes of Mark: Who is Jesus? and the subsequent message of Jesus emphasizing suffering as a prerequisite for glory.

In vs. 6-13, Jesus is portrayed as a man of authority. He has the authority to send the apostles in the first place and the power to give them the authority over the evil spirits. He commissioned the apostles to preach the message of repentance from sin, and the text implies that he gave them the power to cure the sick, the power of healing. Mark juxtaposes the power of Jesus over spiritual evil, sin, and physical evil, disease, to show him as a man of power and authority, another step in unveiling the person of Jesus, the God-Man.

The Apostles were charged to take nothing with them but the bare necessities. They were also admonished to stay in places where they received a warm welcome and to leave places where there was no welcome or receptivity.

Scripture writers speculate that Mark has this commissioning section follow immediately after the rejection of Jesus by his home town folks of Nazareth, perhaps to show the contrast between acceptance and rejection, openness and close mindedness, the Jewish view of Messiah and the universality of the message of Jesus.

Researchers think that the words of Jesus to the Apostles were quite practical concerning taking only the bare necessities, not only was it easier to go from town to town but it also enhanced the credibility of a missionary announcing the nearness of God's Kingdom, when that missionary was not encumbered by possessions or "things" of this world. It seems to be a lesson on dependence on God rather than the insurance of the things of men.

Verses 14-29 of chapter 6 tell us about the death of John the Baptist. Mark begins this section by asking his thematic question—Who is Jesus?—perhaps John the Baptist come to life. The story of John's death by Herod can help to give us an insight into the second theme of Mark, the Glory of God through the death of Jesus. Certainly the death of John was a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus on the cross. The lesson that Mark seems to be building is that to follow Christ leads to the complete giving of self, even death.

### REFLECTIONS

*In what ways am I open or closed to the message of Jesus in my life?*

*What are the objects in my life to which I am attached? Do these dominate my life? Could I live on the bare necessities and trust in the Lord?*

*Identify the aspects of "rugged individualism" present in your life and compare them with Mark's message of dependence on God. Can a true Christian survive today?*

*Compare Matthew 10:5-15, Luke 9:1-6, with Mark 6:7-13. Use a commentary to explain similarities and differences.*

*In what ways am I dying to selfishness in my life?*

*John the Baptist gave his life to follow Jesus. What does it cost you to be a Christian?*

## MESSIAH AND LORD (6:30-56)

In this section spanning parts of three chapters of Mark's Gospel we find the message of Mark in capsule form. This gospel writer seems to be addressing his central questions or themes namely, Who is Jesus? The message of Jesus is also for Gentiles, and followers of Jesus will find a pathway of glory through the cross.

In chapter 6, 30-56, we read of three events which begin to reveal the true meaning of the identity of Jesus, i.e., Jesus as Messiah and Lord. These acts describe Jesus as a man of power and compassion, and invite a response of faith and commitment.

The first of the miracle-events recorded in this section was the feeding of 5,000 men with its teaching that God sustains us and feeds us in life to be able to celebrate a future Messianic banquet. The second miracle described was Jesus walking on the water, this stressing the power of Jesus as Messiah and Lord. The third event recorded is Jesus healing the sick by his compassionate touch.

Each of these narratives tells of the power of Jesus, each from a different aspect of that power. Mark uses these stories to slowly but powerfully begin to teach and to answer the question "Who is Jesus" by showing him as Lord and Messiah.

In a contrasting way Mark also demonstrates that the Apostles were not yet convinced of the reality of the messiahship of Jesus. In fact, the incredulity of the Apostles is evident throughout the whole section. Mark's final theme, therefore, begins to come into focus, that is, Jesus cannot be understood apart from the cross and resurrection.

## MESSAGE FOR ALL (7:1-8:10)

All of chapter 7 and the first part of chapter 8 give evidence of Mark's preoccupation of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. He has Jesus verbally attacking the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and in a radical and revolutionary way establishing the beginning of the New Law. It is not external acts that keep the law, but internal intention of affirming the meaning of the law, that keeps it. Jesus continued to attack the existing attitudes by saying it was not the food that went into the body that defiled it, but what came forth from a person's heart in evil deeds and immoral acts that defiled him. By using the contrast of internal and external, Jesus began to teach about his new message for all.

Mark then emphasizes the universality of this message by the next two miracle stories. First, he tells how Jesus met a Gentile woman in a Gentile town; she asked that he heal her sickly daughter. Because of her persistence and basic faith in him, he healed the woman's daughter. The second miracle story is the cure of the deaf mute in the area of Decapolis, again probably a Gentile man in a heavily Gentile area, cured by Jesus because of the persistence of the request for a healing and cure.

Mark concludes this section by repeating the story of the miraculous feeding of thousands by Jesus. Writers contend that maybe these are two events or perhaps the same event repeated but set in

*In what ways in my daily life can I perceive that Jesus feeds me and sustains me?*

*When have I felt the compassionate and healing hand of Jesus touch me?*

*Compare Exodus 16 with Mark 6:30-44. Do you see any similarities?*

*In Mark 6:30-44 first Jesus taught the people then He fed them. Compare this pattern of activity with the Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist format of worship.*

*What keeps me from seeing the message of Christ in my life? What strands of incredulity still remain?*

*Is there any aspect of my faith-life where I feel like a hypocrite?*

*Compare the incredulity of the Apostles with the persistence and faith of the Gentile woman.*

*Ask someone from the group to give a witness talk on how the theme "Pathway to Glory through the Cross" is a reality in his/her life.*



the area settled predominantly by non-Jews or Gentiles. Nonetheless, Mark is clearly stating that Jesus feeds the non-Jews, his message is also for the Gentiles, the New Law is for all.

### **FAITH VS. PROOF (8:11-21)**

It can be said that there is an opposite and complete separation between proof and faith. Proof in its common understanding evokes thoughts of exactness, certitude, absolutely without doubt, whereas faith tends to be expressed in terms of belief on the word of another, belief without exact certitude, belief because of the person speaking, etc. Proof and faith can be contrasted in the concepts of “sure thing” and risk taking. Proof, scientific or mathematical, is along the lines of “sure thing.” And faith is “risk taking” on the word of another, or with the person who speaks. In a real sense proof and faith are opposites, for proof needs exact certitude, and faith grows on trust but dies with exact certitude.

In 8:11-21, Mark relates two scenes which are a real-life setting for the application of the definition and understanding of the concept of proof and faith. The first involves the Pharisees and the second involves the Apostles.

The Pharisees encountered Jesus and asked from him a sign or proof of his authority; they demanded a miracle. It was the ageless attitude of “show me” so I can believe, or prove it to me—or else. Scripture says it was also intended to trap Him in his words.

Once again Jesus reacted immediately with disdain for people with closed minds. He removed himself from their company, moving to the next place, and holding not so much as a small conversation with the questioners.

The Apostles themselves were not entirely free from such close-mindedness. In vs. 14-21 we read of the dialogue of Jesus and the disciples concerning His words of admonition to beware the attitude of the Pharisees, of becoming like them in their mode of thinking. Jesus challenged them, with the questions: “Are your eyes blind? Are your ears deaf? Didn’t I feed you—and you still don’t understand?” The humanity of Jesus appears here in that he must have been on the verge of impatience and exasperation with his closest followers.

### **BLINDNESS AND VISION (8:22-30)**

It could be proposed that a mini-theme for these eight verses is that of contrast between vision and blindness, light and darkness, understanding and confusion. Mark includes in his Gospel the story of the cure of the blind man at Bethsaida. It is of some interest to us now as we study Mark, that he places this story after the encounter of Jesus with the Pharisees and before his soul-searching question of the identity of Jesus, stressing the mini-theme of blindness and vision, openness or closed-mindedness to the message and identity of Jesus.

A second event that emphasizes this mini-theme is the questioning of the Apostles by Jesus concerning His identity, “Who do people say I am?” and then “Who do you say I am?”

*Under what circumstances am I open or closed minded to the message of Jesus in my life?*

*Am I a person who insists on “proof” or am I comfortable in my understanding of faith?*

*Following the theme of “Who is Jesus,” the Apostles still aren’t sure who He is as yet. When do they come to a realization of Jesus as Messiah?*

*How can we blend the faith of a Christian life with the proof necessary for life in the world?*



It is interesting to look at the blind man of Bethsaida as a person who kept looking for the truth, as a searcher for the true message of salvation. His friends presented him to Jesus, and his blindness necessitated the attention of Jesus not once but twice. Indeed he was a person who struggled to “see things clearly.”

By comparison, look at Peter, who in v. 29 says “You are the Messiah” and in v. 33 rejects the idea of the suffering and death of Jesus. He too is a person who is struggling to “see things clearly.” In both cases Jesus is saying have faith in me and I will heal your blindness.

The entire core message of what Mark is trying to say is contained in vs. 27-38. In answer to his thematic question of “Who is Jesus,” Peter says in v. 29, You are the Messiah, and in relation with the theme of this booklet—“Pathway to Glory through the Cross,” Jesus says in v. 34, “If anyone wants to come after me, he must forget himself, carry his cross and follow me.”

Here Mark states the great Gospel paradox: we must give up to get, we must let go to possess, we must die to rise again, we must lose our life to gain eternal life.

*In what ways am I a person who keeps looking for the truth in my life?*

*How would I answer the question “Who do you say I am?”*

*Invite participants to prepare and give a witness talk on “Who is Jesus” —Who do you say I am? from important and significant events of his/her life.*

*Discuss how you have discovered that the message in vs. 34-38 is a counter-culture statement for today’s disciples of Jesus.*

# PATHWAY OF THE SON OF MAN

(MARK 8:31-10:52)



**JOURNEY IN FAITH** Stark Mark in his brief and concise prose has provided us thus far with six voyages of Jesus in his preaching mission in and about the region of the Galilee. Now in the midsection of his narrative, Mark will carry us "on the way" from the Galilee to Jerusalem and the final journey of

Jesus to the cross. It is a journey of enlightenment with the disciples from Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem, and we who follow will be made aware of our own journey in faith. To keep the journey constantly before us, Mark will provide us with six "on the way" references (8:27; 9:30, 33; 10:17, 32, 52). During the journey, Jesus will seek to illuminate his disciples so they may understand the purpose of his journey. He will provide insights for them of the mystery of who He is as "Son of Man." He will be the "suffering Messiah" whose cross will point to the silence of God and the powerful saving acts which resound for those who can see. These will be the actions of Jesus and most profoundly the action of the cross.

The section which we will explore and travel together concludes with the revealing story of blind Bartimaeus who came to the light of faith and discipleship. He saw with the eyes of faith and his new sight (insight). What a sharp contrast from the disciples who misunderstood time and again and moved from lack of understanding to desertion of their Rabbi as Jesus moved onward to His death. It was these very actions of Jesus that prevented the disciples from being present when the "Son of Man" was glorified, that profound moment when the silence of God broke forth to reveal the true identity of Jesus. Ironically enough, this realization was on the lips of a Roman centurion, an unbeliever. The disciples should have been able to see beyond the shadow of doubt; "this man was really the Son of God."

Mark's favorite title for Jesus is really the one Jesus selected for himself, "Son of Man." It is his self understanding as the one who serves, the one who suffers, and the one who will die for others. Here in the center of Mark's reflection (8:31) the fact of the impending suffering of Jesus will dominate the narrative as the central teaching point of Jesus' ministry. The observation of Jesus concerning his suffering is always completed with the fact that he will also rise from the dead (8:31; 9:9; 9:31; 10:34).

**DISCIPLESHIP (8:27-38)**

Caesarea Philippi, a region north of the Sea of Galilee and largely pagan, was the site of the first prediction of Jesus concerning his passion and death. But this prediction, and those subsequent instructions to the disciples, fell upon deaf ears. Peter, speaking for the twelve, rejected the instruction. The concept of "suffering Messiah" was abhorrent to him. After all, any person carrying a cross was undoubtedly on the way to death! Peter rejected the concept of a "suffering Messiah" because its meaning was only too clear: disgrace, failure, ignominious death. The Messianic role should be one of joy, victory, the power over one's enemies! Peter played into the hands of Satan and the evil one in trying to determine for Jesus a role that he had already rejected. Peter would accept only a continuation of the success story of Galilee and a ministry which attracted followers who received the Word and followed after Jesus.

Following Jesus' confrontation with Peter, Jesus charged his followers with the conditions for discipleship as he envisioned them. Those who followed him must be prepared to come to terms with the suffering, humiliation, rejection and failure in the eyes of the world. One must give up power to follow Jesus and one must commit to the possibility of placing one's own life on the line for the sake of another. Understanding of selfhood comes through the giving of self and the look into and beyond death, where, in the silence of God there is found life, light and peace. Humiliation and suffering go hand in hand with discipleship and if it leads to death, what matter; for through death the true disciple gains, never loses.

**REFLECTIONS**

*How far does your own discipleship go?*

*In what ways has it broken down as of late?*

*What are some possible considerations for more positive ways to renounce self in order to understand self more completely?*

**FAITH (9:2-29)**

There is no doubt that Mark intended his community to better understand the risen and transfigured Lord in terms of God's revelation to his people of old. The Jews of Mark's community would appreciate and remember such encounters of the past. Elijah was told, "Go outside and stand on the mountain before the Lord" (1 Kings 19:11). And on that same mountain called Sinai, that beautiful experience of Elijah recalls a similar experience of Moses the Lawgiver (Exodus 33:18-23). Perhaps too, Mark desires to show that the outcome of the passion, the suffering and death of Jesus lead to his vindication and his glorification on the cross. The disciples did not comprehend what Jesus was telling them. "After six days" (note the precise time reference which refers to the first passion prediction in the Caesarea Philippi region) we are led together with Peter, James and John up that high mountain (Tabor or Hermon?) where a remarkable encounter with God took place. There, too, are found Moses and Elijah.

Again from another mountain the shining cloud, "Shekinah" the presence, the dwelling of God continues to be found, but now in the presence of his Beloved Son. The glorified Christ confronted his disciples and in this shining moment they could not comprehend what they saw. They could not accept the vision since they could not understand the journey that leads to glorification. It is that same understanding Mark seeks to affirm for the disciples who are now



part of Mark's community. They must see that they too are the "Easter" people who arrive at the zenith point in the person of the suffering Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth.

And what of the Elijah understanding of the disciples? Jews who knew their scripture and the writings of the prophets believed Elijah would precede the coming of the Lord in the Messianic age (Malachi 3:23-24). Jesus responded to their questions as they descended from the mountain, that Elijah had already come back, but that he was not recognized in the person of John the Baptizer. John's mission, that of preparing the people for the day of the Lord was the same as Elijah's. Perhaps in the Baptist's fate, Mark implies that Jesus recognized his own fate.

Before the journey can be resumed, Mark adds a final exorcism account of a young boy (9:14-29). This account has for its main theme the centrality of faith. You will remember that Jesus had previously given to his disciples the power to heal and to exorcise (6:7-13). As his disciples, they were to travel as he did, to rely on the communities they served to provide for their needs. In a way it was a matter of relying on God acting through his people. If their faith in him was sufficient, God's power would flow through Jesus and into the activity of the disciples sent out in his name. Mark tells us that the faith of the boy's father, by his own admission, was not sufficient and that he had given way to desperation, "If out of the kindness of your heart you can do anything to help us, please do!" Even the disciples of Jesus were unable to bring the demon out of the boy. Could this condition of faith be found within the membership of Mark's community? In the telling of this story, is Mark implying the faith-life of the Markan community is not what it should be?

To faith-life must be added prayer; Christians must be able to come to the realization that it is through prayer, strong and ardent, that the presence of the risen Lord with them can be felt. Community prayer provides the power and support to do God's work, which is to proclaim and build up the conditions upon which the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus will become a reality.

### **KINGDOM (9:30-50)**

The journey of Jesus continues from upper Galilee and the Hula Valley to lower Galilee (9:30) and the lake city Jesus had made his own, Capernaum (9:33). Mark's pattern of events through the mid-section of his Gospel repeat a construction previously utilized; a geographical reference, a prediction, misunderstanding on the part of the disciples, followed by an instruction or teaching. Following Jesus' second prediction of his passion, death and resurrection, there was a definite reticence on the part of the disciples to inquire further and fear of probing deeper into the mystery of Jesus' fate continued to obscure their vision of what Jesus is all about. Mark develops, at this point, a community discourse: Jesus' instruction to his disciples.

In Capernaum Jesus inquired of his disciples what they were discussing "on the way." In their silence Jesus perceived the discussion centered on the hierarchical positions of the twelve in the kingdom. Gently, Jesus rebuked them, pointing out that one must be

servant to another, something Jesus saw as the essence of his own ministry. Rejection, too, of another, who was not part of the "in group" of disciples was rejected by Jesus. Many outside the twelve will subsequently be able to minister uniquely in the name of Jesus. No one who professed or followed after Jesus was to be rejected or despised. Since Jesus said of himself that he had come to seek out the little people, the "anawim," those who were poor, needy, rejected or utterly dependent puts out a strong warning to any disciple who would turn against the very ones to whom he had come to preach the good news. How could anyone acting in his name deliberately lead astray those who need love so desperately? To scandalize the little ones, or to ignore in oneself those things which lead to sin, to gloss over those faults which impair ministry to others, is most serious because such actions lead not to the kingdom but to a place called hell which Jesus likened to the Valley of Hinnom. This valley, south of Jerusalem, opened into the Kidron Valley and was constantly smouldering since it was fed with the refuse of the city.

*Have you ever thought about the "in group" in your parish?*

*How do you deal with the problem of the insiders and the outsiders?*

*What is your attitude toward Church and church?*

*Does your parish deal with this very well in the ecumenical context?*

### SERVICE (10:1-45)

The journey of Jesus continues inevitably southward toward Jerusalem through the region of Judea and the land "beyond the Jordan" to the district of Perea on the east bank of the Jordan river. Mark's geographical notation brings Jesus closer "on the way" to the cross and sets up the third carefully constructed series: geographical reference, prediction, misunderstanding and teaching which brings us, who journey with him, to the conclusion of the Gospel midsection (chapter 10). In this section Jesus instructed his followers in a community discourse on marriage, children, wealth and reward. The Pharisee's question to him concerning the Mosaic law on divorce was not refuted or disdained by Jesus; rather, Jesus affirms the Jewish scriptures (Genesis 1:27, 2:24), insisting that God in his creative effort intended marriage to be an indissoluble union of man and woman, authored by God himself from the beginning. Neither partner may be exempted from the responsibilities inherent in the marital covenant and both must work to maintain the bond of love envisioned in the creative act of the first man and woman. Moses' dispensation from the law was a pragmatic response prompted by the "hardness of heart" of his people but which, however, called for a consideration of God's mercy when such a union was broken. In no way was divorce condoned as an action acceptable to God.

To the little ones belong the kingdom. To those least able to understand belongs this wonderful gift of God. In the children of Jesus' time are seen all those who, in simple faith and openness to the spirit, have learned to trust the Father. The gift of the kingdom is theirs to have and to hold. As the children of his time were solemnly blessed by Jesus, so too those of simplicity and innocence in our time will inherit the kingdom through the love and generosity of a loving Father who pursues his children with love and gifts, simply because they are his children. The message for the disciples of Jesus is made clear and holds true for each of us today. It is in the power of service to the least of the brothers and sisters that the kingdom breaks forth with promise for those who are touched and for those too, who, in

their love reach out to find the risen Lord where he told them he would be found.

The pronouncement story of the wealthy (young?) man who aspires to discipleship and the concluding instruction to the disciples speak to the fact that the call to discipleship must be paramount in our lives. Nothing must be allowed to stand in the way. Our own achievements may place us in the esteem of humankind, but in reality, we make it into the kingdom through working with God's grace, nothing more.

The companion instruction that follows is in answer to Peter's question, "What about us? We have left everything and followed you." Peter and his companions were assured by Jesus that their discipleship would not go unrewarded. Those who are involved in authentic discipleship in today's world can reflect on the spirit it imparts to their lives, the warm and intimate relationships of the Christian community that speak of the Presence, and the immediate example and inspiration from those who struggle joyfully and in whom the risen Lord is alive and well.

The journey of Jesus and the twelve continues on the road up to Jerusalem (10:32-45). From anywhere in Palestine, one always ascends to Jerusalem. "Going up" was a familiar phrase for many Jews who would make the ascent for the three major feasts in the Jewish calendar. If Jesus and his disciples were in Perea, no doubt their ascent to the holy city would have been by the old Roman road that links Jericho to Jerusalem and continues north up the Jordan Valley. Somewhere in the Jordan Valley enroute to Jericho, the third prediction, misunderstanding and subsequent instruction took place. In this geographical setting Jesus' prediction to the twelve was most graphic. The details of his apprehension and deliverance are told in terms that Mark will use again in the passion narrative. The reaction of the twelve must have been foreboding and caused no small amount of distress in Jesus or themselves. From lack of understanding, the disciples journeyed on to failure and desertion as disciples. The words of Jesus did not long remain in the consciousness of his disciples. Two of them whom Jesus had named the "Sons of Thunder," James and John sought a clarification of the reward for their own discipleship: seats up front in the hierarchical structure of the new kingdom. For their presumption, the two were set upon by the others who harbored like wishes. Jesus intervened to instruct them once again. The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. What then must his followers do? True greatness will be achieved in humble service to others and the model for this service will be the Son of Man "who will give his life as a ransom for many." James and John asked Jesus to be seated at his right and left hand when he came to glory. But in that moment of glorification when Jesus was raised between heaven and earth on his cross, the disciples would have long since deserted him and their positions would be taken on the right and left in his place of glory by two unwilling criminals. Nevertheless, Jesus promised that they all would drink from his cup of sorrow and in the end they would become partakers of his glory. This they will achieve in the assumption of the servant role which they will later come to understand. Just as He their Lord did, the disciples as leaders will be servants to all.

**SIGHT** (10:46-52)

Eighteen miles northeast of Jerusalem lies the city of Jericho and the winding Roman road which ascends to the Judean mountains. The feast of Passover was drawing near and Jerusalem would swell with pilgrims camping round the environs of the holy city. Jesus led the way up to the great city accompanied by a great crowd, most of whom were on foot. A blind beggar, Bartimaeus, lay beside the road. He sensed the excitement and learned that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. In desperation he called out for healing, for he had heard of this marvelous Rabbi. His request, predicated by his cry "Son of David," was simple and direct, "Master, that I may see again." Bartimaeus' faith and hope in the Rabbi of Nazareth and the heir of the Promise of David, was rewarded; sight was granted to him. The midsection of Mark's narrative is now complete, having begun and ended with someone coming to light. It is a sharp contrast against the continuing blindness of the disciples who in their constant closeness to the Lord remain closed to the insights and instruction he has tried to give them. And so Bartimaeus who came to sight, came also to fullness of faith and discipleship as he followed along the road, on the way to Jerusalem. The "outsider," Bartimaeus, became an "insider" (a disciple) through the power of faith. With simple, confident faith in Jesus, Bartimaeus too began his ascent to Jerusalem, walking in the newness of light and discipleship.

Jesus had disclosed this role of suffering servant Messiah. Time and again he gathered the twelve to spell out his destiny for himself and the conditions and destiny of those who accept discipleship. There is no escaping evil in this world, not for Jesus and not for those who accept discipleship. The cross points the way through the evil of life to life itself. One must be able to reach out to heal, teach, encourage, assist, to be there to those most in need even though there is a sense of dying in this process. And, perhaps, even physical death may be the outcome of this goodness. It was so for Jesus.

Those who would be disciples will certainly have to change their lives. Change involves risk. To really live as Jesus did one must be found where he was found, deeply involved in the struggle of the powerless against evil. That is where the cross points. In that mystery of the Cross and Suffering is found the promise of life in its fullness. It was so for Jesus who drank fully of the cup of suffering and death and found that draining the cup was not an end, but a beginning.

Involvement with Jesus means involvement as his disciples in the struggle over evil; it means committing ourselves to the journey he took, the people he served, and having the same faith he had in that same God who vindicated him with resurrection. With that same faith we know that we too shall rise to share the reward he holds out to disciples, the reward of victory over death.

*What are the modern-day obstacles to true discipleship?*

*Is there a particular significance in the fact that Jesus leads the way up to Jerusalem?*

*Where else does Mark use similar language?*

*In this section just concluded, do you see any significance in Mark's use of "along the road" or "on the way" passages?*

*Is true discipleship really possible for us?*



# JUDGMENT ON JERUSALEM

(Mark 11:1-13:37)



**DRAWING A PICTURE OF GOD** The story is told of the little girl who was busily drawing a picture. Her curious mother approached her, and asked her what she was doing. The little girl replied: "I'm drawing a picture of God." Her mother laughed and said, "But no one knows what God looks like."

The girl replied confidently, "They will when I get finished."

Mark's Gospel is a dramatic presentation of a picture of God, a picture that unfolds slowly and mysteriously. If the entire Gospel of Mark can be called a "passion narrative with an introduction," then these last three chapters before the passion account can clearly be portrayed as a particular introduction. These chapters intensify the confrontation of the powers of good and evil—a struggle that began with Jesus' encounter with demons in the desert and will conclude with the apocalyptic struggle at the end of time. In chapters 11 to 13, we see Jesus enter Jerusalem, now "enemy territory," and seek to reclaim it as "God's territory." The theme of judgment threads through these chapters, Jesus' judgment in words and actions in chapters 11 and 12, and the scene of final judgment in chapter 13.

## ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM (11:1-11)

This portion of the drama opens with the most triumphal scene of Jesus' earthly ministry—his entry into Jerusalem. The joyful cries of the crowd are the traditional chants of Psalm 117—the hymn the pilgrims would sing as they entered Jerusalem for the Passover. The difference, however, is that the Hosannas are spoken as if to Jesus, who comes as "the Master," as one who will ultimately be manifested as "the Lord."

The scene is a superb study of human fickleness. The crowds that cheered Jesus would later jeer him on the following Friday. If we are inclined to be worried about what others may think of us, Palm Sunday and Good Friday offer a useful study.

## JESUS CURSES A FIG TREE (11:12-14)

I have always preferred to see in this scene a real touch of Jesus' humanity—an angry outburst of a man totally frustrated by incessant demands and attacks.

Mark, however, sees it as a parable of the judgment on barren Israel for not producing fruit. The man who spoke words of healing now speaks words of judgment.

**CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE (11:15-19)**

What might be seen on a purely human level as another violent outburst of Jesus, is seen by Mark as a judgment against the abuses of the temple. This scene connects with the scene in chapter 13 as Jesus fulfills the apocalyptic hope that when the Messiah comes there will be a universal cleansing and in the last days there will be a renewal of the temple.

The complex multi-faceted personality of Jesus is given new dimension in this chapter. Jesus was not afraid of his own angry feelings nor was he afraid of the anger that it provoked.

**THE WITHERED FIG TREE: FAITH AND PRAYER (11:20-25)**

In this scene, there are really two basic messages: To assure that our petitions are answered, we need absolute trust that what we have asked for will be given. To assure that our sins will be forgiven, we need to forgive others. The Christian has the position that any defendant in a court would envy—the ability to write our own verdict. If we forgive, we will be forgiven.

**THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS (11:27-33)**

The confrontation between the powers of good and evil, now moves from trees to people. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, he was once more met by his enemies. The question was one of authority. They asked Jesus where he got his power, and he asked them where John got his. They pleaded the “fifth amendment,” and Jesus used their refusal to answer his question as a reason not to answer their question.

This scene is not simply included as an exercise in verbal debate. It points out the stubbornness of these religious authorities, and vindicates Jesus and John as operating with the authority of God himself.

Chapter 12 carries on some of the themes of chapter 11. The incident with the fig tree is now followed with a parable of the vineyard. The controversy over the authority of Jesus is now followed with further controversy about the emperor and the resurrection. From all this controversy comes a discourse from the Lord on the greatest commandment and some further comments on the hypocrisy of Jesus’ opponents.

**REFLECTIONS**

*What do we learn about the fickleness of human nature from Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem?*

*Are we comfortable with an angry Jesus?*

**PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD (12:1-12)**

The cursing of the fig tree symbolized Jesus’ judgment on barren Israel for failing to receive his teaching. The parable of the vineyard symbolizes God’s judgment on Israel for rejecting those who came bringing his teachings.

Jesus was clearly the “loved son”—so identified at his baptism and transfiguration. Throwing the son’s body out of the vineyard may be a reference to Jesus’ crucifixion outside the city gates. Jesus even quoted from the psalm that the crowd had chanted as he entered the city. Jesus was the “stone rejected” that will become the Stone.

The parable then is a story of murder, told to potential murderers, who were angry enough to murder Jesus then and there, but were afraid that the crowd just might murder them.

The irony of the parable and of the following controversies is that it is the religious leaders who presented the greatest opposition to Jesus. One of the real challenges to evangelization today is the realization that disillusionment with Church leaders is often a greater challenge to conversion than temptations from the world. Jesus modeled that personal fidelity to his people with assurance indicating that God, not God's spokesmen, will have the last say in salvation history.

### **TRIBUTE TO THE EMPEROR (12:13-17)**

The famous story of the coin of tribute has several interesting twists. By asking his interrogators for a coin, Jesus indicated that he and his followers didn't have a coin, but the Pharisees and Herodians did. By asking them to name the inscription, he forced them to name Caesar's name without putting Augustus before it, thus hinting at their own stand against the "great one" of Rome. Instead of being trapped on charges of treason or blasphemy, Jesus indicated that God must be supreme in all of life, and that political control may just be a fact of life.

The issue can be translated in many ways in our own day. Are we not often caught up in issues that pit a nation's self interest against the larger understanding of our common brotherhood and sisterhood under one Father? Clearly our loyalty to our nation is not compromised by our belief in a God who loves all nations.

### **THE SADDUCEES AND THE RESURRECTION (12:18-27)**

In Mark's drama, as one group departs the stage, another suddenly appears. Judging by the variety of the groups, opposition to Jesus was clearly an ecumenical endeavor. During his trial, Pilate and Herod became friends. During his life, various opposing factions seemingly became friends. It reminds me of the cartoon of the couple talking to the marriage counselor, and the husband saying: "The only thing we've been able to agree on for the last five years is that neither of us likes you."

The Sadducees presented the question of resurrection. They told a story that really included "all in the family."

Jesus corrected their faulty notion of resurrection. He assured them that the risen were like angels and not interested in marriage (thus dashing my last hope as a celibate). He further argued that since God is a living God, anyone who stood in a relationship to him, must also continue to live.

There is wisdom in observing how Jesus answered what appears to us as a very foolish question. As a Scripture scholar once observed, "If we answer people's foolish questions, they may yet trust us with more serious ones."

## THE GREAT COMMANDMENT (12:28-34)

Many of our greatest insights into life are born from our pain. Jesus, standing in the shadow of the cross and surrounded by controversy, articulated the great commandment of love.

Love of neighbor was not a new concept in Jewish thought. Over a hundred years before Jesus, Rabbi Akiba stated: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself; this is the greatest general principle in the Torah." Jesus, however, seemed to be the first to join this principle with the first commandment.

Whenever I read the Shema "Hear O Israel. . .," I recall the story of the cloistered, contemplative nun who was asked what her life was all about and she responded: "We spend our lives trying to keep the first commandment."

## DAVID, HYPOCRISY, THE WIDOW'S MITE (12:35-44)

Mark concludes this twelfth chapter with three rather disparate scenes. Jesus explained how the Messiah can be both David's son and his Lord. Next Jesus turned his judgment on the scribes. He showed how the avarice of the scribes blinded them to their own hypocrisy. Apparently preying on the piety of rich old ladies has a long tradition in organized religion!

Finally, in the passage about the widow, Jesus showed the great commandment in action. Loving with "All that we have" is the measure of true love. The ultimate evaluation of this kind of love is not how much we give, but how much we have left.

## CHAPTER 13 MANY REALITIES TOGETHER

Chapter 13 is about the end times—the end of the temple, the end of the world. And it is about the present times—present at the time of the writing—about the persecutions the young Church was enduring.

Whenever we get into apocalyptic literature—symbolic literature describing the end times—we often risk confusing fact and symbol. Fr. Raymond Brown, the noted Scripture scholar, once referred to the Book of Revelations as the "happy hunting grounds" for neurotics. There are people who seem to devote a significant portion of their life's energies to playing with symbols and numbers.

To some degree that is true of portions of this chapter. We need to remember that we all express ourselves coming from our own unique backgrounds. Apparently, it was impossible for the prophets to conceive of a day of wrath or of judgment apart from the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus, thus, chose those same terms. In essence, however, Jesus said nothing about when that end time will be. He offered some information but not much more than what his hearers already supposed.

*Does the religious authorities' rejection of Jesus cause us to have hope in dealing with the limitations of our own leaders?*

*Do we have the simplicity of the widow to risk all for God with no one but Jesus noticing?*



Whatever may be written about the Messianic secret, it seems pretty clear that part of that secret was not to tell the time of "the last times." Passages like this chapter and similar ones remind us that the Scriptures are not to be read in a literal sense as if we were reading our owner's manual for a '79 Chevy. Such literature ought rather to be read as a compilation of various literary forms all aimed at conveying religious truths in varieties of ways.

### **APOCALYPTIC DISCOURSE (13:1-13)**

It seems pretty obvious that Jesus would not have been very good at writing tourist literature for the local chamber of commerce. A simple statement by one of the disciples about the beauty of the temple, elicited the response from Jesus that one day the whole thing would be torn down.

In response to a question of when, Jesus began to speak about the lost times and the present times. He described it as a time of anguish and deceit. He had one basic word of advice for his apostles—"trust." Undoubtedly by Mark's time they were already being beaten in synagogues and were standing trials. They were not to be anxious.

As with most apocalyptic literature, this section is based not on fear but on hope. No matter what happened, Jesus told them about it, and promised to stay with them through it.

### **THE SUPREME TRIBULATION (13:14-22)**

This second section begins with the "abominable and destructive presence." Gerard S. Sloyan once remarked: "the abomination of desolation is perhaps the best known meaningless phrase in the Christian's vocabulary."

Basically it refers to a pagan altar built by Antiochus IV in the Temple precincts about 168 B. C. This passage refers to that and possibly to similar things Caligula was doing in 40 A. D.

The tribulations Jesus was referring to were to be unique and so this passage is removed from the purely historical and placed in the eschatological. "The chosen" are, of course, the members of the New Testament Church.

### **LAST ACT OF THE DRAMA (13:24-37)**

The Jesus who entered the city in triumph two chapters ago will be the son of man who returns to the earth in triumph at the end of the world. This Jesus who will have already suffered will bring his suffering Church to glory.

The key to being prepared for all of this is to be "on guard." Those words run through this whole chapter. It is only fitting that they end this chapter. Ours is a faithful God. Jesus has suffered and we will suffer. The Father did not abandon Jesus and he will not abandon us. God will be faithful. We have only to be on guard.

*Do we trust the Lord in time of crisis?*

*How do we deal with the death of someone we love?*

*Is our God a God of fear or of hope?*

# THE PASSOVER

(Mark 14:1-42)



**THE ANOINTING OF JESUS AT BETHANY** (14:1-11) Two days before the passion of Jesus was to take place, an incident occurred that was a good example of why he so upset the religious establishment of the time . . .

Jesus was in the town of Bethany and had accepted an invitation to dine with a man named Simon, who was afflicted with leprosy and was, therefore, a social outcast. Through entering Simon's house, Jesus was disregarding again the religious mandates of the time, which forbade the faithful from close contact with those who were considered "unclean."

A woman entered the house during dinner and created quite a scene by smashing open a jar of very expensive perfume and pouring the ointment over Jesus' head. (Mark tells us that the oil, which was made from the root of the spikenard plant mixed with pistachio for coloring and imported from India, was worth the equivalent of 300 days' wages.) Some of the disciples were scandalized by what was going on; such an anointing was usually reserved for royalty and even then was considered to be extravagant. They protested that the woman should have sold the oil and donated the proceeds to the poor.

The answer that Jesus gave them probably did very little to calm their moral outrage: "Let her alone. Why do you criticize her? She has shown me a kindness. The poor you will always have with you and you can be generous to them whenever you wish, but you will not always have me. She has done what she could. By perfuming my body she is anticipating its preparation for burial. I assure you, whenever the good news is proclaimed throughout the world, what she has done will be told in her memory."

Although Jesus' response probably confused and upset all of the apostles, it seemed to be the last straw for Judas Iscariot, who was the group's treasurer. While Mark does not specifically make this connection, the implication is explicit in the next paragraph wherein he tells the account of Judas plotting with the chief priests.

## THE PASSOVER (14:12-31)

Following the incident at the house of Simon the Leper, Jesus continued to act in a mysterious manner. The next day he instructed two of his disciples (Mark does not mention their names) to enter the

### REFLECTIONS

*Why do you suppose the story of the anointing at Bethany was significant enough in Mark's eyes to be included as part of the Gospel account?*

*Using a concordance, what biblical precedents can be found for this type of anointing?*

city of Jerusalem and look for a man carrying a water jar. They were told to follow the man and that the first house he entered would be the house in which they would dine during the Passover. Jesus guaranteed that, even though it was the most difficult time of the year in Jerusalem to find a room, all they needed to do was tell the owner that, “the Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?” (14:14) and that they would find a room already prepared. They did so, and found it just as he had told them.

Mark does not devote the same attention to the Last Supper as do the other evangelists, for example, he makes no mention of the washing of the feet. He does however tell about Jesus’ unique method of predicting the betrayer. Mark writes about this event in tragic literary form, concentrating not so much on the identity of the betrayer as on the treachery of the act. In Mark’s eyes, Judas had rubbed salt in the wounds of Jesus, not so much by the act of the betrayal itself but by the fact that he had violated table-fellowship, which was a sacred thing to the Semite people. The highlight of the story is when Jesus said, “it is one of the twelve—a man who dips into the dish with me.”

It is obvious from Mark’s recounting of the story of the first Eucharist that he is using words that he has heard repeated many times. The form is unmistakably liturgical and gives the reader a good impression of the solemnity of the moment. There is a touch of poetry in the words that Jesus uses, for example: “I solemnly assure you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the reign of God” (14:25).

Mark ends the story of the Passover celebration on a dramatic note: “After singing songs of praise, they walked out to the Mount of Olives” (14:26).

### THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN (14:32-42)

Mark seems to switch literary styles in the next two sections wherein he maintains an almost journalistic style without including any editorial comment. As the evangelist recounts the stories of the foretelling of Peter’s denial and the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, the reader gets a taste of the tremendous sense of aloneness that Jesus must have felt. Mark’s goal in both stories seems to be to show the fulfillment of the prophecy in the thirteenth chapter of Zechariah, “Strike the shepherd that the sheep may be dispersed” (v. 7). The reader is left to wonder whether Jesus’ agony in the garden was caused more by trepidation regarding his upcoming execution or in disappointment because his trusted friends kept falling asleep on him.

If there is any witness to the truth of the Gospel account, it can be found in the story of Gethsemane. It is in this section that one comes face to face with weakness and humanity. One must wonder how great a temptation it must have been for Mark to skip over this section

*Compare the Eucharistic account in Mark (chapter 14, verses 22-26) with the similar account in Luke (chapter 12, verses 14-20). How does the mood seem different in the various accounts? Reflect on Mark’s use of the word “covenant” in the Eucharist account. Compare this with the prophecy in Jeremiah, chapter 31, verses 31-34.*



entirely so as not to air the weakness of the apostles in public. We see Jesus at his most human moment when Mark says, "Then he began to be filled with fear and distress." It is hard to imagine how Peter, James and John could possibly respond to Jesus in his hour of need by falling asleep. What more convincing argument could be made for the need for salvation?

The story is actually one of tremendous hope. Jesus' passion and death take on new meaning in the light that these were indeed things he feared, and would have preferred to pass up. With Mark's help we discover that the apex of spirituality is found in Jesus' words, "But let it be as you would have it, not as I" (14:36). This is a message that we would never have heard had Mark only written about the majestic side of Jesus' nature.

The general sense of the passage is that something beyond all comprehension is going on, as is evident in the actions of the disciples. Mark is careful to show that all this is happening in order to fulfill what is called for in the Scriptures. It becomes obvious that the apostles didn't yet understand, especially when Jesus told them, "But after I am raised up, I will go to Galilee ahead of you."

*In what ways is this passage still beyond our abilities to comprehend the relationship between Jesus and his Father?*

*How does Jesus call us each to be vigilant in our own situations?*



# PASSION AND RESURRECTION

(MARK 14:43-16:20)



**THE CROSS AND THE GLORY** This portion of the Gospel is probably the most familiar of all the stories that we know about Jesus. All four evangelists tell it and they give it the longest and most detailed treatment of any other event in Christ's life. Although they differ in some details, the passion accounts do contain the most similarities that are found among the Gospels. They all stress Christ's innocence and they use Old Testament references to indicate this as a fulfillment of Scripture. The differences that we note among them may be seen in the tone and the style of the evangelist particularly with regard to his audience.

Mark's passion story is told simply and factually. The reader is presented with a highly emotional drama in a very low-key manner. He seems to invite the reader to look on from a distance. Mark's purpose in writing his Gospel is to proclaim Jesus as Son of God. The story is brought to a final climax with the centurion's words in chapter 15, verse 39, "Clearly this man was the Son of God."

## ARREST OF JESUS (14:43-52)

Jesus' arrest by the armed crowd is briefly and candidly described. The stark reality of his betrayal by Judas, one of the Twelve, and the subsequent desertion by the others, is presented without comment or excuse. Mark offers no explanation for Judas' traitorous act and here as in the other Gospels, Judas is identified as one of the Twelve. The use of the kiss, a sign of friendship, by Judas seems to indicate the depth of his treachery. Jesus is clearly the strong figure in this scene. He is not afraid—he is in control. In fact, he chided them for use of this nighttime encounter, reminding them of the many opportunities they had to arrest him in the past. However, he submitted to them so that Scripture would be fulfilled. There is no clue as to which Scriptures are being cited. At this point all deserted him and fled. The identity of the naked young man is not clear. It is thought to be a veiled reference to Mark himself. His flight points to the total abandonment of Jesus.

## THE TRIAL (14:53-15:20)

The trial before the Sanhedrin seems to be a kind of preliminary hearing before bringing Jesus to Pilate. Mark's account differs from Luke and John. He indicates two trials. There is an overall sense that

## REFLECTIONS

*Compare the Jesus in this section with the Jesus in the garden (14:32-39). What do you think accounts for the change?*

*How have you utilized time with the Father to bring you through a difficult situation?*

Jesus did not stand a chance in these proceedings. Mark emphasizes that the testimony of the witnesses did not agree, which was a necessary condition in Jewish court proceedings in order to establish a case against a defendant. Yet, in spite of this, Jesus was condemned and turned over to Pilate anyway. The charges against Jesus regarding the destruction of the Temple are considered false by Mark because the true meaning of Christ's message had been misunderstood. Jesus was speaking of his own death and resurrection as the destruction of the Temple and that he and his church after him would be the new Temple. These people were not getting the message. The story of Peter's denial is once again a demonstration of the brutal honesty that is found in Mark's passion account. The report of the weakness and fragility of one of the closest of Jesus' followers was told by all four evangelists and it was well-known to the early Christians. It must have been for them, as it can be for us, a consolation as we fail in our attempts to be his followers. The charge leveled against Jesus was blasphemy, probably due to his claim that he would sit at God's right hand and act as judge. The tearing of the robes by the high priest was a sign of horror at hearing such a claim.

The trial of Jesus before Pilate is described by Mark so as to lay the blame with the Sanhedrin for Jesus' death. There was an attempt to insinuate that Jesus had claimed for himself a title that would have political significance. Pilate obviously saw through these accusations and even urged Jesus to defend himself. After placing the burden for authorship of the title of "king" on Pilate, he remained silent. Eventually, Pilate responded to the pressure of the crowds and without passing formal sentence, handed Jesus over to them to be crucified, even though he knew their motives. The execution by crucifixion was a Roman sentence; execution for the Jews was by stoning. (Note Stephen's death in Acts 7:57.) The custom of granting amnesty to a prisoner is not known of except in the Gospels. It explains the presence of the crowd which would not otherwise have been gathered at that time. Here again, the cruelty of the crowd was highlighted in their demand for the release of a convicted murderer and the execution of an innocent man. Jesus suffered further humiliation and pain at the hands of the soldiers who took charge of him for crucifixion. The use of the robe and the crown, normally signs of royalty and military success, was intended as a mockery related to the claims against Jesus. The account of the soldiers' behavior is probably an accurate one.

### CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH (15:22-47)

Jesus' manner of death by crucifixion with two thieves at his side demonstrated the level of success of the chief priest's propaganda in inciting the crowd. Jesus in refusing to accept the drug to alleviate his suffering is seen as affirming his commitment to the will of the Father which he resolved in the garden at Gethsemane. Once again Mark relates in the simplest possible terms the most dramatic scene in the

*Consider the fact that the story of Peter's denial was preserved in the early church. What does this lead us to believe about the church then? . . . today?*

*Pilate was a weak civic leader who carried out the wishes of an angry mob when he knew it was wrong. What parallel can you think of in your life?*

*Think of some political dangers that face Christians today. Can we imitate Jesus' attitude? How can we face them?*

Gospel. Following what seems to be a detailed account of the events leading up to it, he states, "Then they crucified him. . ." (15:24). There is no comment—there is no anger or disappointment—just a simple statement. Mark goes on, however, to describe the hours preceding the death of Jesus. The mockery of the people continued, and this time the chief priests and scribes joined in. They called to him by his true identity and they asked him for a sign so that they might believe. Yet, it is for performing such signs that they have accused him of blasphemy. The actual death of Jesus appeared to have been a frightening moment. The description of the darkness and the loud crying out of Jesus enhanced the significance of what happened. The darkness over the land was the only way to portray the true condition of man's stance before God at this point. The call of Jesus, which Mark recounts as being misunderstood by the bystanders, was in fact a call of hope and trust in God (cf. Psalm 22) which illustrates the possible stance of mankind before God. Mention of the torn curtain in the sanctuary is a powerful theological statement of Mark which indicates that access to God was no longer limited to the once a year visit of the high priest through the inner veil in the Temple but, now, through the death of Jesus all people are granted access to God. The words that declare the heart of Mark's message were placed on the lips of a Roman—a non-Jew. . . . "Clearly this man was the Son of God." Others identified as witnesses "looking on from a distance" were some women who will later play a role in the Resurrection story.

The account of Jesus' burial was recorded to confirm his death. There can be no accusation later on as to Jesus merely having been in an unconscious state and having been revived. The fact of the death was necessary for belief in the resurrection. Joseph of Arimathea was a prominent Jew and his actions were those of a courageous man. Again Mark simply relates details. Jesus' body was released to a member of the group that was responsible for his death; he was hurriedly buried and not one of his disciples was there, which was a violation of Jewish custom and law. It is noted that his burial place was observed by the women.

### THE EMPTY TOMB (16:1-20)

The precision that we have noticed in reading the passion narrative is gone from the resurrection account. At this point the emphasis is not on what happened but on the Easter message. All four Gospels agree on the empty tomb; they differ on other details. The story simply states that the women who were going to anoint Jesus discover that the stone which had been placed over the opening of the tomb had been rolled back and Jesus was not there. They saw, instead, a young man "dressed in white" who told them Jesus had been raised up. It was these women who were to carry this report to the others. Bear in mind, for Mark, the key to Jesus' mission is in his recognition as Son of God; the resurrection is proof of that. The credibility of the resurrection story was the key to the success of that

*It is a non-Jew who first expresses belief. The religious leaders could still not see. Do you think you would have believed? Explain.*

*Read Psalm 22. How does Jesus' cry from the cross now appear to you?*

*Reflect on Jesus' funeral. Write down the names of the people you have met in Mark's Gospel who you think should have been there. Why?*

*What would you have done?*



*Does the empty tomb have relevance for us today?*

*That was a difficult message for the women to carry—have you ever had a difficult message or a principle on which you had to take a stand? Explain.*

*We realize that Jesus' instructions to his followers are not limited to the Eleven. Think about opportunities you have had to speak of Jesus. How have you responded?*

*In what way can you meet the challenge to witness to the Risen Lord in your life?*

mission. Most certainly the Gospel writers would never have attributed this story to women since at that time women could not be recognized as witnesses for anything. For this reason, the account of the discovery of the empty tomb and the reporting of this by women could not have been a created story. It must have had an authentic basis in fact. In all Gospel accounts, women were the first to hear that Jesus had been raised up. There still seemed to be fear and confusion and disobedience, Mark told us that they said nothing to anyone.

Just as the opening verses of Mark's Gospel spoke of Jesus Christ as Son of God, so at the completion of that story the epilogue speaks of Jesus, the risen Lord. It contains a brief summary of the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, to the two on the road (probably the same story as we read in Luke 24:13) and finally to the Eleven. Jesus took them to task for the lack of response to the resurrection message and then he directed them to tell the story—spread the good news. The story must be told. It is belief in this story and the message of the cross that will lead to salvation. He further promised that miraculous signs would accompany those who profess this faith. In this account, Jesus' ascension took place on Easter itself and Jesus, who was now called "Lord" (v. 20) was still present with the eleven as they go forth.



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