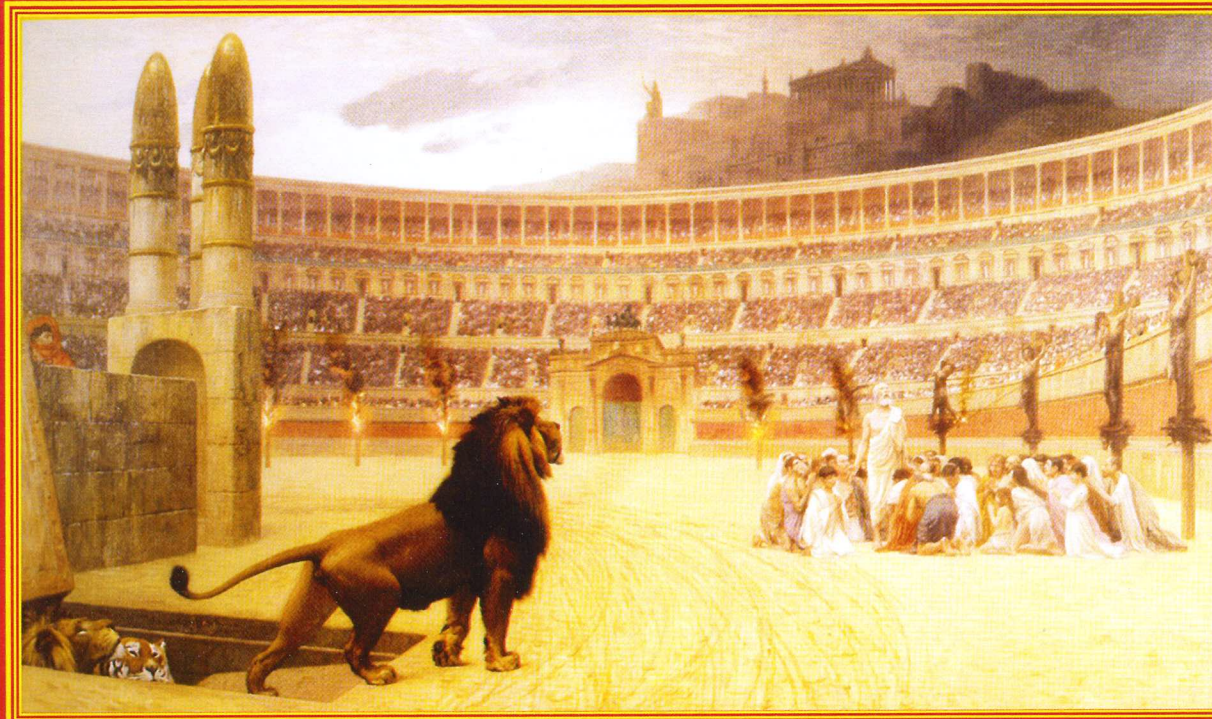


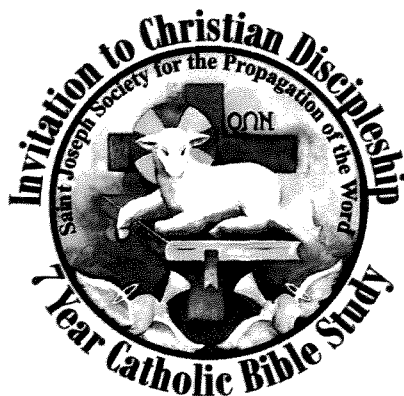
SOUND OF THE LION



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MEDITATIONS ON THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING TO SAINT MARK

INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP



SOUND OF THE LION

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FOREWORD

This work, *Sound of The Lion*, is part of a larger Catholic Bible study, *Invitation to Christian Discipleship*, which consists of lectures, summaries of lectures, and worksheets. *Sound of The Lion* is the summaries and work sheets for the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Mark.

This comprehensive study has been designed for the Catholic laity that the “Word of Christ,” rich as it is, dwell in them.

*Thus they will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that they may attain the fullness of God himself.
(Eph 3:18-19)*

The general motivating force behind this study is the preservation and growth of the Christian Faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries. It has four immediate goals:

1. To ensure a true spirit of repentance
2. To foster a deeper commitment in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ
3. To create a greater awareness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer
4. To encourage a more vibrant participation in the life and mission of the Church

Invitation to Christian Discipleship has been accredited by the Catechetical Institute of the Diocese of Orange, California. It is now available to all parishes and at-home study groups. It is designed for a lay person to present.

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PREFACE

There is only one Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There are four inspired versions of the one Gospel: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The word *gospel* means “good news”. It reveals the good news about the salvation of mankind. As St. Paul explains, “*I mean that God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's transgression against them*” (2Cor 5:19). The Gospel brings divine revelation to us. It reveals the love of God in Christ and his work of universal salvation.

The Church teaches, “By this revelation, then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man is made clear to us in Christ who is the Mediator and at the same time the fullness of all revelation” (Div. Rev. 1-2). Through Jesus Christ we come not only to know God and experience salvation, but we encounter in Christ the fullness of revelation as Jesus Christ is God Incarnated.

After the Apostolic times and before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the Church rejects any subsequent revelations that claim to be both public and divine. As the Church teaches, “...we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Div. Rev. 1-4).

God chose certain individuals as prophets and apostles to make known divine truth. This Divine Revelation, revealed through the preaching of the prophets and apostles, became the Religious Tradition within the believing community. This same Divine Revelation, recorded by inspired scribes, became the Holy Scriptures within the Church.

INSPIRATION AND REVELATION

We must not deduce from the above that the entire written Bible is to be understood as Divine Revelation. There is a distinction between divine revelation and divine inspiration. Much of what is written in the Scriptures concerns itself with the circumstances surrounding the revelation--both the effects and the reactions to the revealed Will of God.

We will have no problem if we bear in mind the distinction between revelation and inspiration.

The word “inspiration” comes from the Latin word *inspirare*, which means “to breathe into.” To say the Scriptures are inspired implies that the Holy Spirit of God, in some manner, influences these writings. The Catholic Church, through the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, confirms the divine inspiration of the Bible, and defines the nature of inspiration and divine revelation. We read, “Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors, or sacred writers, must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings *for the sake of our salvation*” (Div. Rev. III-11).

This teaching is subtle and easily misunderstood. It insists that divine revelation is limited to “that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.” Therefore, it is the intention of the sacred authors to teach those sacred truths needful and useful for salvation--regardless of the literary means used by the sacred writers to express these truths. We should not read more into the Sacred Scriptures than the Holy Spirit intended. We may say that every word of the Sacred Scriptures is inspired but not every inspired word is a divine revelation. To know what God intended to communicate through the sacred writers--and actually did communicate through their writings--calls for a proper interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures.

INTERPRETATION OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

A proper interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures seeks first to know what the author intended to write. This is called the “literary sense,” in a word, the sense intended by the inspired human author and that sense actually expressed by the words used by the sacred writer. Therefore, a proper interpretation of the Scriptures seeks to know what the words actually expressed at that historical moment, and what the author actually intended to express in the words and literary form used. Obviously, this is no simple task. Not only must the ancient usage of the language be understood, but equally important would be the circumstances and the culture in which the author lived and wrote.

There is a need to go back at least nineteen hundred years to properly interpret the sacred writers of the New Testament. The past is not the present, and the past must be permitted to give its own voice. The sacred writers must be understood in their own world if their message is to shine forth properly today. This demands much research on the part of biblical scholars.

The Second Vatican Council emphasized one of the most valid principles for the proper interpretation of the Scriptures: the best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself. A particular scripture must be seen in the light of the entire revelation. A proper interpretation of a particular scripture will be in harmony with the rest of revelation. For example, we read in Exodus 33:11, "*The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another.*" In the next verse we read, "*You are my intimate friend... You have found favor with me.*" A literal interpretation of that isolated scripture would be that Moses looked upon the face of God. However, that would not be what the author intended. Previously he had related that God said to Moses, "*But my face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives.*" For the proper interpretation of a scripture it is often necessary not only to read other verses of the text, but other sacred books, in order to maintain the harmony that rightly belong to divine revelation.

The written scriptures do not claim to be the fullness of divine revelation. The Church proclaims Jesus Christ to be the fullness of divine revelation. Christ remains with the Church and continues to guide it through the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit the Church possesses the complete treasure of revelation. It acknowledges the Holy Spirit to be "the living voice of the Gospel." The Church teaches that proper interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures must not only be in harmony with the rest of Scripture but also in harmony with the traditional apostolic teaching of the Church. As the Holy Spirit is author of both, there is harmony between the revealed elements of faith. Therefore, the Church teaches, "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is committed to the Church."

Prayer must accompany the reading and studying of Scripture. Unless the Holy Spirit enlightens the reader, the effort becomes, in the words of St. Jerome, as effective as stones skipping across a frozen pond. Without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, Scripture does not open its treasures nor serve the life-giving nourishment needed by the human spirit.

The Church teaches that divine revelation demands no less than the obedience of faith, which consists of a “full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals.” *“If you hear the voice of the Lord today, harden not your hearts!”* A faithful student not only believes the truth revealed, but is guided by its light in everyday life.

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT MARK

THE PRELUDE

Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, testifies around 135 AD that “Mark became the interpreter of Peter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not indeed in order of the things said and done by the Lord.” Today, we call this work spoken of by Papias the “*Gospel of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ According to Saint Mark*”. Tradition affirms the author to be the John Mark mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.

Mark writes in Rome sometime after 64 AD. He writes in Greek, the universal language of the day. Mark intends his gospel account mainly for Gentile converts who face unpopularity and persecution from the state because of their faith in Jesus Christ. He writes to support the faith of persecuted Christians. Mark reveals to his readers the life of suffering Jesus endures and the death He undergoes. In Mark’s gospel account, Jesus warns His disciples that they will be treated no better than their Lord. They too, as His disciples, will suffer for His name’s sake, but, as they persevere in sharing in His sufferings, they one day would also share in His glory. Mark's gospel narrative is called “the martyrs Gospel” as it is written to encourage Christians faced with the possibility of having to die for their belief. Already the sounds of the lions are heard in the arena.

CHRISTIAN TRADITION

The early Church is not so much interested in the life of Jesus, but what deeds constitute the “good news”, in other words, what contributes to the salvation of mankind and establishes the kingdom of God. It is for this reason the Death and Resurrection of Jesus are the essentials of the Gospel. The death of Jesus is interpreted as the sacrifice which takes away the sin of the world. By the time this gospel account was being written, much information existed as Christian Tradition in the form of independent and unrelated stories.

Not all Christian teachings are drawn from the earthly life of Jesus. Christian prophets also play a part in creating Christian Tradition. It is taken for granted that in the early apostolic times the heavenly Jesus continued to reveal to the Church truths about Himself. The very night before His death Jesus said to the Apostles, *“I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. When he comes, however, being the Spirit of Truth, he will guide you to all truth”* (Jn 16:12-13). The Church sees no real distinction between the Jesus who reveals while on earth, and the Jesus who reveals from heaven through the Christian Prophets as ministers of the Holy Spirit. Certain truths realized after the Resurrection, such as the divine son-ship of Jesus, find their way into the teachings of the earthly life of Jesus, when in reality they are revealed after the Resurrection. These teachings belong to what is called the “Easter Faith”.

ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCE

Papias informs us that Mark is the interpreter of Simon Peter. The Acts of the Apostles preserve a sample of the preaching of Peter, and most probably preserve the style in which the early Church proclaims the Gospel. The sermon of Peter can serve as an outline for Mark's written account of the Gospel. Mark immediately begins with the baptism of Jesus by John, and continues with eight chapters of miracles and exorcisms that prove the claim of the Gospel: the kingdom of God is present on earth in Jesus of Nazareth.

Mark's own religious background and expectations certainly influence his selection and presentation of material. Mark regards Jesus as God's agent, sent to begin the great and final battle against the powers of evil. Mark manifests this in the temptation scene, in Jesus' casting out demons, in calming the sea, and in Jesus' success in silencing His human opponents whom Mark regards as agents of the devil.

Mark presents Satan as the agent who snatches the Word of God out of the heart of the hearer. Satan opposes the Gospel message. For the message of the Gospel to take root, and for the mission of Jesus to be successful, the power of Satan must be destroyed. God's reign threatens the kingdom of darkness and provokes its evil force into battle. Jesus

appears as the One who proclaims the “good news” and expels the evil forces. Those who follow Him must do the same.

THE ROLE OF MIRACLES

Some scholars believe that Mark wrote in order to correct an erroneous image of Jesus, which certain Christians fostered. They popularized Jesus as a Wonder Worker. Some men and women found this image very appealing to their spirits, but it certainly was not one that would prepare men and women for martyrdom. Both Greek and Jewish literature abounds with the fame of such men as they attempted to promote this very inaccurate image of Jesus’ mission.

Mark recorded the miraculous deeds Jesus accomplished during His ministry. Mark did so because it was well known that Jesus worked miracles and expelled demons. These were signs of the presence of God’s reign in Jesus of Nazareth. However, to see Jesus merely as a wonder worker, and to think these marvels constitute the essence of His mission is to be badly misled. Jesus, as Mark presented Him, had no intention of establishing His claim as Messiah or as God’s Son on the basis of His miraculous activities.

Mark used miracle stories within the Gospel, but not without interpreting them. We see in the very beginning of Mark’s Gospel that Mark associated the healing of a paralytic with the power of Jesus’ words to take away the sins of people. The placement of this episode in the early part of the Gospel may be giving the readers the key for interpreting the miracles that follow. This miracle indicates to the readers that divine power is in the words of Jesus as well as present in miraculous deeds. The purpose of the miracles is to lead people to believe in the power of the Word!

MARK AND THE CROSS

Mark’s narrative centers on the very Person of Jesus. Mark was overwhelmed by the life Jesus lived--a life filled with suffering and ending in a scandalous death on the Cross. In the mind of Mark, it is Jesus’ life on earth and in particular the ending of His life on the Cross that reveals *all*. We will see, after a long narration of the Passion, that

the Gospel abruptly ends. Mark leaves his reader with the taste of the Cross in their mouth. Or better still, pondering in their heart the meaning and mystery of the sufferings and death of Jesus of Nazareth. Mark does not permit the Easter Joy to eclipse the importance of the Cross of Christ. The essence of Mark's Gospel account could be summed up in Paul's proclamation, "*I preach Christ and Him crucified*" (1Cor 2:2).

A GOSPEL SOURCE

The Gospel account of Mark serves as a major source for both of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Mark's version of the Gospel is the earliest and shortest Gospel presentation with 661 verses. Matthew's version, written around 85 AD, has 1,069 verses of which 606 verses pertain to Mark's account, incorporating all but 55 verses of the First Gospel. The Gospel narrative by Luke, composed around 90 AD, contains 1,149 verses. Luke reproduces 320 verses from Mark; 24 of these do not appear in Matthew. Therefore, we are left with only 31 of Mark's verses not appearing in either Matthew or Luke.

As we study the Gospel according to Mark, it will be interesting to note the changes his material underwent at the hands of Matthew and Luke, as they adapted the material for their own purposes. This will give us an insight as to how the Evangelists used the traditional material at hand in composing their presentation of the Gospel.

The Gospel according to Mark is probably the purest presentation of Jesus of Nazareth the Church possesses!

THE GOOD NEWS

Mark's use of the word "gospel" is unique among the four Evangelists. He may have introduced the word into the tradition about Jesus. *Gospel* means "good tidings", and is derived from the Greek word *evangelion*. In classic Greek the word signifies "good news", particularly news of victory. In Roman times, "gospel" applied to the news of the birth of an heir to Caesar or the ascension of a Caesar to the throne. Mark possibly desired to indicate the lordship of Jesus Christ to the Romans by the use of the word "gospel".

Mark equated the Gospel with Jesus. Jesus Christ is the “good news”. The object of the Gospel is Jesus: the power, the passion, the glory of Jesus. It is more than a book that merely recites the events in the life of Jesus. It is the words, the deeds, the death and Resurrection that present Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God--the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The Cross of Jesus is central to the Gospel; it proclaims the good news of God's grace and salvation. The Cross is the Wisdom of God.

The words of the Gospel are alive and spirit filled. The power of Jesus operates through the Gospel. When the Gospel is proclaimed, Jesus is present in power to save those who hear and believe. In other words, when the saving words and deeds of Jesus are proclaimed on the authority of God, the Gospel has the divine power to save a sinner's life. Recall the words in the Book of Hebrews, “*Indeed, God's word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates and divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and reflections of the heart*” (Heb 4:12).

When Mark wrote “*The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God,*” he did not wish to imply the beginning of a book, or even a biography of a person, but the beginning of the saving act of God in the public life of Jesus of Nazareth. He intended to convey to his readers that this same godly power and presence manifested in the earthly life of Jesus, is still present among those who hear the Gospel in faith and accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ! Wherever the words and deeds are retold in faith, the power of Jesus is present to save. The Gospel is not merely an announcement of what God *did* in Jesus, but what God is *doing* in Jesus!

PRELUDE

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SAINT MARK

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

THE SPIRIT WE HAVE RECEIVED IS NOT THE WORLD'S SPIRIT, BUT GOD'S SPIRIT, HELPING US TO RECOGNIZE THE GIFTS HE HAS GIVEN US. (1Cor 2:12)

FIRST DAY: Read Acts 2:22-41.

1. For whom did Mark write?
2. What message did he desire to communicate to the disciples of Jesus?
3. What do you see to be the heart of the Good News in Peter's sermon?
4. In Peter's mind, how should a hearer respond to the Gospel?

SECOND DAY: Read Acts 10:34-48.

1. For whom does Peter see the Gospel written?
2. What do you see is the "good news of peace" proclaimed by Jesus?
3. How is the power of the Gospel illustrated in this reading?
4. What is meant by the Church's "Easter Faith"?

THIRD DAY: Read 1Thessalonians 2:1-20.

1. How did the "Easter Faith" affect the writing of the Gospel?
2. To what does Paul attribute the conversions of the Thessalonians?
3. What do you think Paul means by verse 13?
4. In Paul's mind, who hinders the spread of the Gospel?

FOURTH DAY: Read Hebrews 2:1-18.

1. What works described here demonstrate the Gospel to be divine?
2. What is our first obligation to the Gospel message?
3. What are the effects here of the sufferings and death of Jesus?
4. How does Mark desire to interpret the miracles in Jesus' life?

FIFTH DAY: Read 1Corinthians 2:1-16.

1. To what does Paul attribute the success of his preaching in Corinth?
2. Why are certain persons able to understand and believe in the Gospel?
3. How do you understand verse 14?
4. How can you prepare yourself to be more receptive to the Gospel?

SIXTH DAY: Read the First Letter of Peter 1:13-2:12.

1. What does being obedient to the truth mean to you?
2. When a person experiences the love of God what should they do?
3. Why does the Gospel have the power to change lives?
4. How can the study of the Scriptures aid you to “grow into salvation”?

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

The first thing Mark relates is that a prophet has risen in the land. It is the mission of a prophet to be the mouthpiece of God to the people. God does not speak *to* a prophet, He speaks directly *through* prophets. With the deaths of the prophets Hagai, Zechariah, Malachi and Joel, the voice of God had grown silent in Israel. The divine silence lasted for over four hundred years. During this time the rabbis spoke of hearing *bat-kol*, “a daughter of the voice”, which was but an echo of the heavenly voice--an inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The written word of law replaced the spoken word of the prophet as the vehicle of the revelation of Yahweh. Prophecy as a guide of faith for Israel was replaced by the teachings of the scribes, and by the seers such as Enoch and Daniel, the authors of apocalyptic works.

Through the Prophet John the Baptist, the voice of God resounded again in Israel. John awakened a religious revival in the land. John's importance in the New Testament comes from the fact that all four Evangelists connect John with Jesus. John's ministry both prepared for and inaugurated the ministry of Jesus. Mark described John in these prophetic words, “*I send my messenger before you to prepare your way: a herald's voice in the desert, crying ‘make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path’*” (*Mk 1:2-3*). These two prophecies announce two people: John, the messenger, who prepares the way in the wilderness; and the Messiah, who follows John and makes His appearance in the wilderness.

THE WILDERNESS

In Jewish history the desert wilderness plays an important part as the environment God used to prepare His people for the Promised Land. The “forty years” experience was filled with hopes and promises, and failures and despair. In the desert, Israel is established and declared to be “Son of God”.

In prophetic teachings, the desert wilderness became symbolic of a spiritual condition in which Israel serves Yahweh, and God loves His people. What Israel enjoyed in the desert was lost in the land of Israel. The prophets called for a renewal of exodus into the wilderness in order to restore Israel's son-ship with Yahweh. They declared that Israel must return anew to the wilderness, as her filial relationship with God could only be restored by her humble submission to God's will. All those things that pride and disobedience achieved must be sacrificed. Israel must acknowledge her whole history of disobedience and be willing to be reduced once again to zero. Her reduction to nothingness would be the beginning of a new history of grace. Therefore, the Prophet Isaiah called for a Second Exodus.

John the Baptist identified the wilderness with a state of spiritual repentance. The silent voice of God spoke again through John, demanding contrition and confession of sins, and the turning of individual wills over to God. John demanded baptism as a sign of repentance. The voice of the prophet called and people came from all over the land to be baptized.

SPIRIT OF REPENTANCE

Repentance implies turning from one way of life and embracing another. Biblically, it implies turning from evil ways and deeds to the will of God. It is a radical concept, for it demands a total change and relinquishment of all previous attitudes and habits, and a rejection of one's former life with its false values and illusive desires. The Prophet Hosea picturesquely described it as the return of a faithless wife to a loving husband (Hos 2:14-24). Jesus described it as becoming like a little child (Matt 18:3).

Repentance is truly a divine operation within the human spirit. It is not a work in which one moves one's spirit toward God, but a work of God in which He freely draws a person to Himself through Jesus Christ. The Scriptures confirm that repentance brings salvation. God gives this message to the sinful through Isaiah, *"As I live, says the Lord God, I swear I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why should you*

die, O house of Israel?" (Ez 33:11). The Book of Sirach warns the sinner against postponing a return to God (Sir 5:4-9).

Repentance is very prominent in the New Testament. This must be the result of its importance in the teachings of Jesus. The very first words spoken by Jesus in the Gospel are: *"This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand! Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15)*. In order to be united with God through Jesus Christ a person must possess a spirit of repentance. It is a fundamental condition for Christian Discipleship.

THE MISSION OF JESUS

In the village of Nazareth, working in a carpenter shop, Jesus heard the call to Israel to repent. It is not the voice of John that Jesus heard, but the call of His Father. His time had come! Jesus heeded the call to repentance, He left everything and began His journey south toward the mouth of the Jordan River. With others, Jesus followed the call of John to the wilderness, where Israel's son-ship with God is to be renewed. Jesus knew what it meant to be human in the sight of God. He freely accepted what it means to be a human sinner before the Divine Justice of God.

Jesus was born into the Jewish race. He identified the Jewish People with Himself. He incorporated Israel within His unique person. He became Israel before God--Israel with all the burden of its long history of alienation from Yahweh. Like Moses, He did not divorce Himself from the sins of His people.

Not only is Jesus the symbol of Israel, He is the New Adam. Jesus incorporates all mankind within Himself. He became the representative of sinful humanity before God. When Jesus stepped into the River Jordan to be baptized, He freely accepted the vocation to which God had called Him--to be the Redeemer of Israel, the Savior of the world. That day in the Jordan, Jesus truly committed Himself to the Cross, to another "baptism" that would make Him restless until its accomplishment. Our Beloved Brother Jesus would pay the debt of sinful humanity in full by His sufferings and death.

This humble act of obedience to the Father's will demonstrates Jesus' true son-ship. The Father confirmed this to Jesus: *"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 heaven: 'You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests'"* (Mk 1:10-11). It is in Jesus that Israel returns to the desert in repentance, and her son-ship is renewed. The descending of the Holy Spirit and heavenly voice attested that the lost son-ship is re-established in and through Jesus. As Jesus descended in utter humility and meekness into the waters of repentance, the Holy Spirit was drawn from heaven into the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth.

TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS

According to the expression Mark uses, *"At once, the Spirit drove him out into the desert"* (Mk 1:12). The words indicate strong propulsion on the part of the Spirit. Entrance into the wilderness follows baptism by necessity, symbolizing repentance. The heart and essence of repentance is not the negative element of turning from sin, but the positive condition of submission to the Will of God. Jesus committed Himself to fulfill the will of God on behalf of humanity. The true spirit of repentance precedes baptism and continues after baptism. Repentance is the fundamental spirit of Jesus and therefore of discipleship.

The determination of Jesus to abide in the wilderness, to abide in the spirit of repentance, brought Him into conflict with personified evil. Satan engaged Jesus at the beginning of His ministry, and attempted to win a decisive victory against God by turning Jesus from His vocation and mission. Mark relates only the first clash and not the victory. Jesus does not win the victory in forty days, nor did temptation cease after it. Mark saw the entire public life of Jesus as an encounter with satanic forces. The environment of those forty days symbolizes the entire environment of Jesus' earthly ministry. When Mark related the presence of "wild beasts" and "angels", he implied that all the forces of both heaven and hell were present in the wilderness temptation, indeed, in the life of Jesus on earth.

The Hebrew word for temptation, *nasah*, means "to try" or "to test". Temptation is a test to reveal the inner disposition or will of a person rather than his or her abilities or virtues. We need to distinguish between two kinds of temptation. One has a good end and flows from a good

source, namely God. The other has an evil intent and flows from an evil principle, namely Satan. When a temptation comes from God, it is a test and trial sent for the good of the human spirit. When it comes from Satan, it is seduction to evil and has deadly ambitions. Temptation from God enables us to grow in virtue (humility) and love of God. Temptation from Satan seeks to separate a soul from God. It is wise to bear in mind that Jesus teaches that Satan is a liar and murderer, deception and destruction are his fruits--deceive and destroy! (Jn 8:44).

A Christian must expect trials and tribulations. We have but to look at the Lord's life, and those who were His friends, to know this is true. God tests us not in order to prove how strong we are, but in order to make us stronger. Temptation calls the will into conflict. It causes us to exercise our wills to make a decision. Every decision of the will strengthens either a virtue or a vice.

The trial of temptation comes to everyone. We pray in the Our Father for deliverance from Satan's temptation. Satan tempts with one purpose--spiritual destruction. Destroying God's work in the soul alienates a person from the love of God and destroys the person. We have in the Bible two classic examples of the human person verses Satan. The first is the temptation of Adam and Eve--the fall of mankind and the victory of Satan. The second is the temptation of Jesus of Nazareth--the fall of Satan and the victory of Jesus Christ. In Adam we fall, in Jesus Christ we stand!

It is important that the Evangelist notes that the Holy Spirit was poured into the humanity of Jesus prior to His temptations. It certainly taught the disciples that without the power of the Holy Spirit within their lives, defeat in temptation is inevitable.

Both the accounts of Matthew and Luke describe the nature of the temptation Jesus suffered in the wilderness. These temptations and Jesus' response to them defined the nature of His mission. In these temptations, Satan attempted to divert and to impede the true mission of Jesus. Jesus found His defense in God's Word. Jesus was tempted in His flesh, in His faith, and in His allegiance to God. He clung to the Word of God. He confronted each temptation of Satan with "*the Scriptures say*". Jesus found within the Scriptures the light to direct His will in times of temptation; the light of truth destroys the power of

Satan. Every temptation from Satan confronts the Will of God in the life of the tempted. Only by clinging to the Word of God is there victory.

Jesus Christ left an example and a warning to His disciples and to the Church. We are pilgrims in this world--this is our wilderness. If we are Christians who accept our partnership with the Holy Spirit and our mission in this life, we can expect to encounter Satan in numerous ways. Remember these words of Jesus to His disciples: "*Pray constantly for the strength to escape whatever is in prospect, and to stand secure before the Son of Man*" (Lk 21:36).

**INTRODUCTION
TO THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK
SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

*PRAY CONSTANTLY FOR THE STRENGTH TO ESCAPE WHATEVER IS
IN PROSPECT, AND TO STAND SECURE BEFORE THE SON OF
MAN. (Luke 21:36)*

FIRST DAY: Read Hosea 11:1-11; Isaiah 40:1-11 and Sirach 5:1-10.

1. What is the symbolic meaning of entering into the wilderness?
2. What is the scriptural meaning of “repentance”?
3. According to Sirach, what is the danger of postponing repentance?
4. What would the true spirit of penance demand personally of you?

SECOND DAY: Read Mark 1:1-13 and Luke 3:1-22.

1. What is meant by saying John the Baptist is a prophet?
2. What is meant by the sinless Jesus receiving John's baptism?
3. What great truth is revealed by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus?
4. What does the close relationship of the wilderness with temptation teach?

THIRD DAY: Read Genesis 3:1-13.

1. What characteristics of Satan are revealed in the first temptation story?
2. Describe the technique used by Satan to seduce Eve.
3. What result of sin is being described in verse seven?

4. What technique does Satan use to separate us from God's word?
FOURTH DAY: Read Matthew 4:1-11.

1. What was Satan's intention in his temptations of Jesus?
2. How do these temptations seek to influence the mission of Jesus?
3. How does Jesus resist these temptations?
4. How can you defend your mission against Satan's temptations?

FIFTH DAY: Read Psalms 78:17-42.

1. What does it mean to tempt God?
2. How did the Israelites tempt God while in the desert?
3. What was the punishment for such a sin?
4. In what way could we put God to the test?

SIXTH DAY: Read James 1:1-29; Sirach 5:1-10.

1. What two kinds of temptation are found in the Scriptures?
2. How should we look upon the trials sent by God?
3. How can such temptations aid our spiritual growth?
4. Can you recall any trial or test that has made you a better Christian?

CHAPTER 2

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

The public ministry of Jesus began after the arrest of John. By this teaching, Mark illustrated that the work of John had ended and Jesus of Nazareth had appeared--the principle character in the divine drama. *"Jesus appeared in Galilee preaching the good news of God" (Mk 1:14)*. The Greek word "to preach" meant literally to act as a herald, to be the official town crier who announces news of great importance to the public. During the time of war the herald's position was extremely important as he announced to the people victory or defeat--life or death!

Mark sees Jesus as God's herald, going from city to city announcing "good news" and that *"this is the time of fulfillment."* For the Jews, the "time of fulfillment" signified a time decreed in the counsel of God for the final entrance of God into human history. The very next words about Jesus announced that *"the reign of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15a)*. Mark understood that the reign of God was to be in Jesus of Nazareth. God was offering freedom from the Evil One and membership in His kingdom, through Jesus, the Christ.

Jesus became God's beachhead in humanity from which God would begin His reign, a beachhead never to be lost. From Jesus, God would spread His reign over men through the ages. It was the announcement of God's return to humanity, and His victory in and through Jesus--a victory in which all people would be invited to share.

Jesus reiterated the preparatory message of John the Baptist, *"Reform your lives" (Mk 1:15b)*. This message emphasized the importance of repentance as a necessary condition for the reign of God. Repentance must come with faith in the Gospel, *"Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15b)*. Faith in the Gospel is the second stone in the foundation of salvation. Faith gives direction and purpose to repentance.

When Jesus asks us to have faith in the Gospel, we must not think of this as only believing in a message of truth, but believing primarily in a Person--Jesus Christ. Faith in the Gospel implies a permanent, personal relationship between Jesus and the penitent. Everything else in the Christian life--prayer, the Mass, the Sacraments, the Scripture, the Christian Community--are but the means to bring about a union between Jesus and the believer. When we properly understand this to be the mission of Jesus, we can easily see why so much of the work of Jesus among people was a failure.

Generally, when we speak of a "kingdom" we think of a territory with set boundaries, officials, and institutions. In the ancient world a man's kingdom was equated with the extent of his rule—that which he was able to govern by his laws and power. The scriptural word *basileia* means a "reign", not a kingdom. The basic meaning of the concept is the reign of God, not the kingdom of God. In the teachings of Jesus, the primary emphasis is on God's rule.

In the Old Testament the kingdom of God appears in two main ways. On one hand, Israel saw the kingdom of God as present among them, therefore Yahweh was the King of Israel. In Isaiah the Lord says, "*I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King*" (Is 43:15). On the other hand, the prophets of Israel spoke of the kingdom of God as a future expectation and hope: "*The Lord shall become King over the whole earth; on that day the Lord shall be the only one, and His name the only one*" (Zech 14:9).

We may often find the expression the "kingdom of heaven" used in place of the "kingdom of God". Among the rabbis of our Lord's time there was a tendency to avoid the use of the divine name or verbal expressions of God. They would substitute abstract nouns. Instead of saying "kingdom of God", they would say the "kingdom of heaven". They would substitute "the Lord shall reign" with "the kingdom of heaven stands firm."

The kingdom of God preached by Jesus does not mean the area or the people over which God reigns, but simply the rule of God. When Jesus surrendered to the will of God, the reign of God came. We can identify the kingdom of God with Jesus. It is intimately connected with His own Person. It is in His words and works, and His Being, that the Kingdom

of God has come upon Jesus' contemporaries. In Jesus, it has come upon those to whom He speaks--it is truly in their midst! For this reason, while Jesus proclaimed the kingdom, the Apostolic Community proclaims Jesus.

God's kingdom is in a real sense hidden. People are in a position to decide whether they will receive it or reject it. It is urgent that people decide to receive it, for a day is coming when it will be clearly manifested. On that day those who have rejected God's rule will find themselves eternally outside of God's kingdom "*where there will be the weeping and grinding of teeth*" (Mt 22:13). The kingdom of God presents a challenge to every person. Each must decide whether he or she will accept the authority of God in their life.

The coming of God's kingdom on earth is equivalent to His will being done on earth as it is in heaven. Each person is a part of this earth. Each alone is "lord" of a particular bit of the earth known as "self". Each one, and each one alone, decides whether God's kingdom will come into his or her earth or not. God makes no conquest of the soul. He only offers a challenge and an invitation. Each one must freely surrender to the reign of God. Needless to say, this demands not a reform, but a radical change that is nothing less than a personal revolt against the old self.

Jesus encourages us to make any sacrifice necessary to enter the kingdom, "*The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant's search for a fine pearl. When he found one really valuable pearl, he went back and put up for sale all that he had and bought it*" (Mt 13:45).

THE CALL OF DISCIPLES

One of the first acts of Jesus is the call of the disciples. Mark demonstrates the power of Jesus over the lives of men.

In the picturesque reference to James and John leaving their nets and abandoning their father, Zebedee, Mark intentionally stresses the effect of repentance. Mark clearly demonstrates the demands of discipleship. One must be willing to leave one's economic security and the comfort and ease of a chosen life style. Peter and Andrew immediately left their business; John and James immediately left their father and the family business. If God calls us, we must respond at once, regardless of the material or emotional consequences.

No doubt, as this Gospel was being written, many people in Rome faced similar crises in their lives. They were being called by faith to embrace the Christian religion at the cost of the loss of social position, family relationships, livelihood, and perhaps even their lives. Mark indicates that Jesus expects unconditional obedience that does not consider the cost!

Some people were naturally attracted to Jesus and desired to be His disciples. Jesus did not call them because He knew they could not meet the demands of discipleship. Others He called, but they desired to delay their vocation: one because of marriage, another because of business, another because of family obligations. Jesus rejected all of them as unworthy of their call (Lk 9:62). Some people like to play with religion and dabble in it, with a contribution of a few hours here and a few dollars there. Jesus is not interested in contributions but in commitments. In the early Church there was no difference in the commitment by the married couple Aquila and Priscilla than that made by Peter and Paul. The commitment was the same--the ministry was different!

God prepares people for their vocation. John the Baptist was sent precisely to prepare the hearts of people to receive Jesus. Many things enter a person's life, which lead him or her to repentance and to a readiness to accept the will of God. Mark's description of the call of the disciples demonstrates the response demanded by a vocation and what true repentance can mean.

When Peter and his companions accepted Jesus' invitation, their vocations had only just begun. There would be no end. They were being called into an intimate relationship with God through Jesus. They would never become 'Masters' themselves, but forever be the disciples of the One Master, Jesus Christ. It is not easy to be disciples of one who says, "*Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls*" (Mt 11:29). Anyone who accepts the call of discipleship may expect many restless days before the calm of perfect peace arrives.

24 HOURS IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

After the call of the disciples, Mark presents his readers with 24 hours in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. In a summary picture, he captures the

public ministry of Jesus. Jesus began His ministry in the synagogue on the Sabbath--the Lord's Day. The synagogue was the soul of the Jewish Community. If a person had a message from God for His people, he would deliver this message where God's people normally met to hear the Word of God. In our Lord's time this would have been the local synagogue.

The rabbis taught by quoting the opinions of great teachers. Jesus did not teach in this way. He spoke as a prophet, and the people sensed the power of His words. In the synagogue at Capernaum *"the people were spellbound by his teaching because he taught with authority and not like the scribes"* (Mk 1:22). Here Mark relates the power of the preaching and teaching ministry of Jesus.

While Jesus was teaching, a wild disturbance interrupted the synagogue service. A man, possessed by the devil, entered the synagogue and shrieked, *"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God!"* (Mk 1:24). In this episode, Mark illustrates that the coming of the kingdom of God is an assault upon the kingdom of Satan!

It was customary at this time for exorcists to drive out evil spirits with lengthy rituals of prayers, incantations and spells. When Jesus drove out the devil with a simple command, the people were indeed impressed, *"All who looked on were amazed. They began to ask one another: 'What does this mean? A new teaching in a spirit of authority. He gives orders to unclean spirits and they obey!'"* (Mk 1:27).

Mark teaches that tremendous power flowed through the humanity of Jesus. His very presence and invitation so moved the hearts of those who were open to God that they left all to follow Jesus. When He spoke, the hearts of the hearers leapt for joy. They knew in spirit that they were not listening to a mere man, but the Voice of God.

When the power of Jesus encountered people who were adamant and confirmed in evil, He confronted the evil with the wrath and anger of God. When Jesus encountered men and women suffering because of human frailty, afflicted because they lived and acted in ignorance, crushed because they lived in a world alienated from God by sin, He moved toward them with overwhelming compassion and mercy. The

power of God flowed in a healing way from His words, from His touch, even from the material things that touched Him.

With the setting of the sun and the end of the Sabbath, the people could legally carry the sick through the streets. They hurried to the door of St. Peter's house for they knew that Jesus could be found there. Mark teaches that the healing power of Jesus was not exercised in isolated cases. The power of Jesus possessed universality in its expression of divine love and compassion toward all afflicted human beings.

Mark throws light upon a particular miracle performed by Jesus because of the extraordinary nature of the illness, the healing of a leper. The rabbis taught that it was easier to raise a man from the dead than to cure leprosy. Breaking the law, a leper approached Jesus and knelt down as he addressed Him, "*If you will to do so, you can cure me*" (Mk 1:40). He knew Jesus had the power to cure him. What he really said was, "If you love me, you can cure me." It is so easy to project onto God what we receive from others around us. Certainly, he doubted that God could love anything as unlovable as a leper. In this tender encounter, the love of God--through the ministry of Jesus--demonstrated to the outcast, to the lonely, to the alienated from society, that God cared for them. God not only loves men and women but hates all that destroys God's loveliness in them.

The miracles of this day--and those of His ministry--were misinterpreted. The people saw Jesus merely as a miracle worker, not a Messiah or Savior. They came to be freed of the evil effects of their sins, rather than their sins. They were looking for a healer not a savior. They came to receive the "gift" of God without becoming involved with God.

Mark closed the twenty-four hours in the life of Jesus with, "*Rising early in the morning, he went off to a lonely place in the desert; there he was absorbed in prayer*" (Mk 1:35). St. Luke writes, "*He often retired to deserted places and prayed*" (Lk 5:16). Mark writes that Jesus was "absorbed" in prayer. His total being was absorbed in God. It was here He rested and nourished His spirit and found renewed strength to walk the arduous path God's will marked out for Him--a path filled with so many disappointments, difficulties, demands and frustrations.

The Scriptures record Jesus' habits of prayer in order to remind the members of the Church that no matter how involved they may be in a ministry to God or to man, they must withdraw and be alone with God in prayer. The man or woman too busy to pray is *too busy*. They are spinning their wheels and spiritually going nowhere. Prayer is needed to recharge our spiritual batteries with divine energy and power. No person truly seeks the kingdom of God unless he or she often enters within his or her spirit to meet the Divine Guest who abides in the soul. The kingdom of God is within a person. St. Teresa of Avila was fond of saying, "If you do not enter into the Heaven that is within you, you will never enter the Heaven above you!"

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

*THIS IS THE TIME OF FULFILLMENT. THE REIGN OF GOD IS AT HAND! REFORM YOUR LIVES AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL.
(Mark 1:15)*

FIRST DAY: Read 1 Samuel 12:6-25; Jeremiah 10:10-16.

1. What was the meaning of “kingdom of God” in the Old Testament?
2. How did Israel acknowledge God as its king?
3. Why was God angry with Israel for requesting a king?
4. What happens to those who reject the reign of God in their lives?

SECOND DAY: Read Mark 1:14-15 and Luke 12:22-40.

1. What does it mean to say the kingdom of God has come in Jesus?
2. According to Mark 1:15, what is necessary to enter the kingdom of God?
3. What is meant “to believe in the Gospel”?
4. What does Luke 12:31 mean to you?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 13:22-30 and Matthew 13:36-52.

1. In what way can it be said that the Church is the kingdom of God?
2. Why is it important that we enter the kingdom of God here on earth?
3. What do you understand by “Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven”?
4. How is this condition fulfilled or impeded in your life?

FOURTH DAY: Read Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11 and 9:52-62.

1. What lesson does Mark teach you in the calling of the Apostles?
2. In Luke 5:1-11 what lessons do you learn about Christian discipleship?
3. What does a Christian vocation mean to you?
4. What has it cost you to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:14-37.

1. What was the importance of the synagogue in Jewish daily life?
2. In what way did the synagogue serve Jesus and the early Church?
3. What part of the Mass is an echo of the Jewish synagogue service?
4. What is revealed in Jesus' encounter with the demonic man?

SIXTH DAY: Read Mark 1:29-45.

1. What do you find most impressive in the "24 hours in the life of Jesus"?
2. What lesson do you learn in the cure of Peter's mother-in-law?
3. What do you learn from Jesus' encounter with the leper?
4. How do you understand these words of St. Teresa of Avila: "If you do not enter the heaven that is within you, you will never enter the heaven above you"?

CHAPTER 3

SATAN, SIN AND SICKNESS

INTRODUCTION

Scripture affirms the presence of Satan and demons and their effect upon people, but presents a balanced picture. The chief evil principle, Satan (meaning “accuser” or “adversary”), was presented as a servant and creature of Yahweh, but he was obviously no friend of mankind. The Hebrews avoided any reference that could possibly lead the Jews to believe that Satan was a being independent of Yahweh, or equal to Him. Evil spirits do exist and they do affect people and the world around them, but people have free will and are responsible for the good or evil they choose to do.

St. Paul teaches that demons are responsible for false teachings (1Tim 4:1). Demons are essentially lying spirits. They seek to take the truth out of the hearts of people. They endeavor to separate men and women from the Word of God. Jesus identified Satan as a liar and a murderer. The Book of Wisdom attributed the presence of death in the world to the work of Satan, motivated by envy of mankind. The New Testament presented Satan as the Prince of this world, whom Jesus conquered by His life and death. We are told that Satan wars against those “*who keep God's Commandments and give witness to Jesus*” (Rev 12:17).

Pope Paul VI, at a General Audience on November 15, 1972, preached:

Evil is not merely an absence of something but an active force, a living, spiritual being that is perverted and that perverts others. It is a terrible reality, mysterious and frightening... It is a departure from the picture provided by biblical Church teaching to refuse to acknowledge the Devil's existence; to regard him as a self-sustaining principle who, unlike other creatures, does not owe his origin to God; or to explain the Devil as a pseudo-reality, a conceptual, fanciful personification of the unknown causes of our

misfortunes... That fall of Adam gave the Devil a certain dominion over man, from which only Christ's Redemption can free us... This matter of the Devil and of the influence he can exert on individuals as well as on communities, entire societies or events, is a very important chapter of Catholic doctrine which should be studied again, although it is given little attention today.

If we have no spiritual life, we lack any true spiritual vision. How can we “see” spiritual realities whether good or evil? If we lack faith we are doubly blinded; we cannot see ourselves, nor will we accept the vision of those who can see. It is a comfort for us who accept the reality of these spirits to know that the Scriptures tell us, “*Resist the devil and he will flee from you*” (Jas 4:7).

SIN

In the Hebrew Scriptures many words express the concept of sin. One of the most common is *het* which means “to miss the mark”. It signifies a mistake in judgment which results in a failure to obtain a goal or an objective. Such sin rises from a lack of knowledge, “*My people perish for want of knowledge! Since you have rejected knowledge, I will reject you*” (Hos 4:6). Biblically, knowledge does not merely imply knowing about something or someone, but indicates an intimate relationship with the thing or person. To know God implies a union with God. To reject knowledge of God implies rejecting a personal relationship with God.

When the Hebrew Scriptures speak of “iniquity” (*awon*), the word implies a deviation or a distortion. By iniquity, reality becomes what it should not be, what was not intended by the Creator. “Guilt” is the residue of the distortion which remains as an effect of an iniquitous deed. Guilt is a sickness in the soul that results from the disorder of sin. In a sense, it is what remains after the hurricane hits, or two cars collide. Scripture speaks of guilt as being a burden too heavy for man to bear: “*For my iniquities have overwhelmed me; they are like a heavy burden, beyond my strength*” (Ps 38:5). St. Catherine of Genoa teaches that guilt is the result of unrepentant sin, and can become eternalized.

Several Hebrew words indicate “sin” as a rebellion against Yahweh. Rebellion involves a personal offense, as the person purposefully severs his relationship with God. A person takes the initiative through sin to

withdraw from God. One seeks to hide and withdraw from God. The expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise was only what man and woman willed--to be separated from God. No one can have access to the "tree of life" when separated from God. Isaiah proclaimed, "*Your iniquities have dug an abyss between you and your God*" (Is 59:2).

Adam's fall, as described in the Third Chapter of Genesis, is an introduction to the next eight chapters, which illustrate the destructive and corruptive forces of sin. Sin, as an evil leaven, spreads until all are corrupted and, as Genesis records, "*The bent of man's heart is evil from his youth*" (Gen 8:21b).

The Deluge, as recorded in Genesis, teaches that God punishes sin. Death is the primary effect of sin. Each sin moves a person further away from God, the source of life. A person dies a bit each time he or she sins. Each sin makes a person less than what she or he should be. Yahweh asked, "*Is it I whom they hurt? Is it not rather to themselves and to their own confusion?*" (Jer 7:19). If God prescribes laws and demands obedience it is not for Himself but, as we read in Deuteronomy, it is that a person may have a prosperous and happy life (Deut 6:24). Sin robs God of the glory that should be His in each person. Sin destroys not only the human being but society. The world is worse for what each of us becomes through sin. Reparation for sin demands atonement to God and to humanity.

Israel reenacted the sin of Adam and Eve. The "original sin" of Israel was its refusal to trust God and to abandon itself to Him. They did not desire to walk with God, but rather, desired a god to walk with them. They wanted a god of their own hand--one made in their own image and likeness and controlled by them.

RELIGIOUS LEGALISM

When the voice of prophecy grew silent in Israel, the concept of sin changed. Sin took on an impersonal aspect. It was no longer seen as destroying a personal relationship that exists between God and His people, but as breaking a law of God. It became an indirect offense against God. God was no longer the loving Creator of mankind; he was seen as the Supreme Lawmaker. You gave obedience to those laws or

you suffered the consequences. It was all so clear-cut and terribly dehumanizing for religion.

Legalism dominated the religious spirit of Judaism at the time of Jesus. As the law, which is impersonal, became the supreme religious guide and source of religious security and conscientious peace, religion itself became impersonal. Charity grew cold. The Pharisees sought refuge and security in the Law. They taught that perfection and righteousness came from a perfect observance of the Law, as interpreted by themselves. All who did not keep the Law were clearly and manifestly sinners. Those who strictly observed the Law were the saints and the righteous—they were the sons of God! Judaism was no longer a religion of the Spirit.

The rabbis taught that God Himself could not and does not forgive sins through free grace, but requires that every sin be atoned for by sacrifice or paid for by good works. It was their teaching and belief that a sinner could not be forgiven by God until the sinner had achieved merit by the works of the Law. Legalism created a terrible caricature of religion with evil consequences. It created a spirit of hopelessness and religious despair in those who could not keep the Law. In those who did keep the Law it caused spiritual pride and complacency!

JESUS AND SINNERS

The attitude of Jesus toward sin and sinners was revolutionary. Jesus was the return of the Spirit and personal presence to religion--the return of the Spirit of God's love! Jesus taught that sin was the wandering of the son from the house of his Father, and the sinner had only to return to the Father for forgiveness. He tells us that there is joy in heaven at the return of the sinner. This is indeed one of the most revolutionary teachings in religious history!

The Church clearly understood that the death of Jesus had atoned for the sins of all people. The Church has the mission to preach the remission of sins and to serve as ministers of reconciliation of sinners with God. The ministry is fulfilled by the power of the Church to forgive sins through the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. This power is implied when Matthew writes, "*A feeling of awe came over the crowd, and they praised God for giving such authority to men*" (Mt 9:8).

Beginning in Chapter Two, Mark presents five narratives that summarize the opposition of the Pharisees and scribes to Jesus. Jesus' attitude toward sin and sinners certainly was the crux of His problem with the Jewish leaders. His teaching attacked their whole theology of religion; their lives and power were constructed upon this theology. The acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah would demand a radical change--a revolution in their religious lives.

The first criticism directed against Jesus concerned the company He kept. When the scribes, who belonged to the Pharisee party, saw that He was eating with tax-collectors and offenders against the Law, they complained to His disciples, "*Why does he eat with such as these?*" (Mk 2:17). Banqueting at the table with others was a gesture of friendship towards them. Jesus offered His friendship to these sinful people--in truth, He offered them reconciliation with God. This is why the Church proclaims in the Mass, "Happy are those called to this banquet!" Jesus did not avoid sinners as prescribed by Law, but sought them out as a shepherd seeks lost sheep. The attitude of Jesus towards sinner is God's attitude.

When the scribes asked why Jesus accepted such people as table companions, they were expressing their disapproval. They were implying that He was an irreligious man, warning his disciples not to associate with Him. Jesus defended His actions by defining His mission to be that of saving sinners. He appears as the Divine Physician healing the wounds of sin.

In the next two narratives, the Pharisees direct their criticism against the disciples of Jesus. The disciples had failed to keep a prescribed fast by reaping and eating grain on the Sabbath. Since these men were the disciples of Jesus, the criticism was indirectly aimed at Jesus. Jesus defended the behavior of His disciples. He implied that a new spirit had entered into religion, and His disciples were not to be measured and judged by the old spirit, "*No man pours new wine in old wineskins*" (Mk 2:22). Jesus' words were found to be true at a later time, when it became impossible for the Gentile Christian Community to express its religious spirit and life through the ancient forms of Judaism. The "new wine" is the religion of the Spirit and it cannot be contained by a religion of legalism or fear.

JESUS AND THE SABBATH

The fourth and fifth narratives deal with the problem between Jesus and the Jews over the Sabbath. All four gospel accounts emphasize that Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath was a major cause of Jewish hostility toward Him. We read in John the following accusation of the Jewish leaders, "*This man cannot be from God for he does not keep the Sabbath!*" (Jn 9:16). The Sabbath was a most important religious observance for Jews. Keeping the Sabbath was not always understood in the same way. In the early days of Jewish history the emphasis was on a day of rest for all people. In the time of Jesus, with the rise of legalism, there was a complete change of emphasis. The Sabbath was essentially a day dedicated to God, and only incidentally a day of rest for people. When Jesus said, "*Man is not for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath is for man*" (Mk 2:27), He stated the proper spirit of the Sabbath Law.

Jesus defended Himself against the accusation of breaking the Sabbath by showing that He had the true spirit of the Law. He taught that people truly violate the Sabbath by their refusal, in the name of religion, to do good for others on the Sabbath. The Jewish problem was mainly their refusal to believe Jesus to be the Messiah and their insistence that He was a mere man, who was subject to the Torah. If they had been willing to see Him as the Messiah, they could have expected that His behavior would be exceptional and somewhat revolutionary.

Someone once wrote that the history of salvation is nothing other than the tirelessly repeated attempts of God the Creator to draw people away from their sins and, we might add, lead them to life. To live without sin, to live in peace with self, neighbor, and with God is not just good sense, it is good health!

SATAN, SIN AND SICKNESS

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE-MEMORIZE)

JUST AS THROUGH ONE MAN'S DISOBEDIENCE ALL BECAME SINNERS, SO THROUGH ONE MAN'S OBEDIENCE ALL SHALL BECOME JUST. (Romans 5:19)

FIRST DAY: Read Revelation 12:1-17; 13:5-10.

1. How is Satan presented in the Old Testament?
2. How does Satan appear in the New Testament?
3. In what way do the Scriptures present a balanced picture of Satan?
4. According to Revelation who will feel the wrath of Satan?

SECOND DAY: Read Deuteronomy 28:15-29; Romans 1:18-32.

1. What word in the Old Testament best describes sin to you?
2. What was the “original sin” of Israel?
3. What did Paul see to be the mother and root of sin?
4. How do you see Satan's power manifested in this world?

THIRD DAY: Read Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 9:1-8.

1. What was the Jewish idea toward the forgiveness of sin?
2. What great power does Jesus claim to exercise in this narrative?
3. Why could the healing of the paralytic be proof of this power?
4. How do you understand “*They praised God for giving such authority to men*”?

FOURTH DAY: Read Mark 2:13-17; Luke 15:1-32.

1. To whom was the parable in Luke addressed?
2. What relationship do you see between this parable and Mark's narration?
3. What was Jesus' attitude towards sinners?
4. How do you feel about public sinners?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 2:18-28.

1. How did the concept of sin change in the history of Israel?
2. How would you describe religious legalism?
3. In what way do you see the spirit of legalism in your life?
4. How can you say that your sins give you a claim on Jesus?

SIXTH DAY: Read: Mark 3:1-12.

1. In Mark 3:5 how do you see the true spirit of the Lord's Day guarded?
2. Why do you think the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus?
3. What connection do you see between sin and sickness?
4. What do you understand by the gift of healing?

CHAPTER 4
THE NEW ISRAEL
INTRODUCTION

The early public ministry of Jesus was evidently successful:

Jesus withdrew toward the lake with His disciples. A great crowd followed him from Galilee, and an equally great multitude came to Him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, Transjordan, and neighborhoods of Tyre and Sidon, because they heard of what he had done.
(Mk 3:7-8)

These crowds may well have symbolized for Mark the future of the Church.

Already, however, the death knell for Jesus sounded in the land! His time on earth was growing short. He knew He must act prudently to ensure the success of God's reign on earth. As always, Jesus sought His direction from the Will of God. Luke tells us, "*Then He went out to the mountains to pray, spending the night in communion with God*" (Lk 6:12). Luke indicates that on this night of prayer--in this mysterious communion with His Father--the Divine Plan became clear. Jesus would establish a New Israel. He would establish His Church.

THE OLD ISRAEL

How well Jesus knew the history of His people and God's dealings with them. A people that was "no people", slaves in the land of Egypt with nothing to recommend them to man or God. He, whose eye is upon the sparrow, chose these people as His own. It was divine predilection, flowing from the merciful love of God. In the Old Testament (Exodus), we see that the people of God were called the *qahal* in Hebrew. *Qahal* was translated into Greek as *ekklesia*, meaning "church." The true meaning of "church" is the "assembly of the People of God". The

Church can be in a desert, on a hill, by the sea, in a building, and even in a hole called a “catacomb”. The Church is not brick and mortar, wood or stone--the Church is a unique kind of people,

God called the Hebrew people to Himself while they were in slavery. He called them to meet Him at Mt. Sinai. God spoke His words to Israel and the people responded in faith to what they heard. This response of faith united them and they became one body. The assembly of God became a reality; the *Qahal*, the Church, was born. God responded by entering into a Covenant with Israel. God prescribed a sacrifice to ratify and confirm the Covenant. This gave expression to their union of faith and their submission to the Word of God.

Israel had three solemn assemblies, each one marking a progressive segregation of the People of God. The first marked their separation from Egypt; the second, their separation from the Canaanite people whose corruptive and idolatrous practices they had adopted; and finally, within Israel itself, as it separated itself into the faithful “remnant” from the rest of Israel. In the days of Isaiah, the faithful remnant became identified with the Servant of Yahweh,

THE NEW ISRAEL

When Luke wrote of Jesus going into the mountains to commune with God, he certainly recalled Moses' ascension to Mt. Sinai to speak with Yahweh, before the formation of Israel as the People of God. Jesus is more than Moses--He is the living Mt. Sinai into whom God has descended. When Mark placed Jesus upon the mountain, calling the Twelve to Himself, we are reminded of Yahweh's calling the Hebrews to Mt. Sinai for the formation of the First Israel. Jesus' calling of the Twelve was the initial formation of a New Israel.

On this occasion there were no thunder, lightning or soul-shaking sounds. Jesus would establish His Church in love, not fear. All the activities within the life of Jesus Christ express divine love. Love is the power Jesus will use to draw men and women to God. If Jesus had little effect upon the lives of the men and women he encountered, it is only because divine love held so little appeal to them.

The New Israel will consist of people filled with faith in Jesus; people open to receive and to grow in the Spirit of Jesus; people destined to become the incarnated Body of Jesus. There will be many minds filled with His truth, many lips to preach His Gospel, many hands to serve His people, many feet to carry the Good News over unknown mountains, many hearts to channel His love into mankind and establish the Kingdom for the glory of God. Many would become one through faith and obedience. The one-in-many would be the Body of Jesus--His Church.

Jesus selected Twelve men, symbolic of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, as the foundation stones of the New Israel. These Twelve formed a unique and elite group to whom Jesus entrusted His mission and power, *“Who hears you hears me, and he who hears me, hears Him who sent me” (Mt 10:40). “I assure you, whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be held loosed in Heaven” (Mt 18:18)*. As Moses had been the acknowledged leader among the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Peter was the accepted leader among the Twelve.

According to Acts, it was the unique responsibility of the Twelve to testify that the Risen Jesus was the same Jesus with whom they had lived so closely. According to Mark, the appointment of the Twelve was for a two-fold purpose: first, that the Twelve might enjoy a close relationship with Jesus, and second, that Jesus might send forth the Twelve to preach with authority and cast out demons. Jesus made the Twelve responsible for the continuation of His mission.

Christianity has been a community from its very inception and foundation. Jesus continues in this community. The identification of Jesus with the community is so strong that to be cut off from the community is to be cut off from Jesus. A Christian Community is formed when men and women of faith in Jesus honestly seek to know the will of God and to accomplish it. When their eyes are upon Jesus, they discover that their minds and hearts are not only one with His, but one with the other members of the community. This is the material of which Heaven is made.

We can certainly say that the continuation of the Divine Plan for the salvation of the world depends upon the Mystical Body of Jesus--the lives of each and every member of the Church. The normal means used by God to establish His kingdom on earth is the Christian Community--

each and every one of us. We are the living arteries through which the Divine Blood--Divine Power and Energy--flows into the world. It is an overwhelming mystery and a profound truth! When we understand that there is a divine dependence upon us, it puts an entirely new light upon our lives and the time of our lives. We become sources of divine light, love, and life! Jesus said to His disciples, "You are the light of world!" (Mt 5:14).

THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN

Mark recorded the negative reaction of two groups of people to Jesus. First, he related the reaction to Jesus by the people from "back home"--spoken of as "*his family*". The Greek word used in Chapter Three, verse twenty-one, can mean "followers," "friends," "parents," or other relatives. Who is meant here is not certain. It probably implies his relatives from Nazareth.

The nicest thing that can be said of these people is that they were concerned over the way He neglected His health. When the report of his behavior reached Nazareth, His relatives reacted in a human way, displaying their disbelief in His divine mission. Their attitude indicates a lack of concern and sympathy for His aims and purposes. Indeed, their attitude is sinfully directed against the Son of Man. Perhaps Jesus spoke of their sin when He said that blasphemies against the Son of Man would be forgiven. It is excusable, to a point, to fail to recognize the dignity of the One who hid Himself under the humble appearance of a man, but the blasphemies uttered by the second group of people, the scribes, is another matter.

The scribes who arrived from Jerusalem asserted, "*He is possessed by Beelzebul, and he expels demons with the help of the prince of demons*" (Mk 3:22). It is generally accepted that Beelzebul is equated with Satan. The name *Beelzebul* was probably a derisive Hebrew alteration of "Prince Baal", meaning "god of the flies" or "god of dung". When we know the meaning Beelzebul carries, we understand even more how offensive and evil the scribes' accusation against Jesus was. They were not saying that Jesus was a helpless victim possessed by a demon, but that there was a willful alliance, a partnership between Jesus and Satan. They claimed that the healing and the exorcisms performed by Jesus flowed from the

power of Satan, and were evil fruits and sinful deeds. This was a total perversion of reality. The very works of the Holy Spirit were identified as evil and the works of Satan as good. For Satan was, indeed, at work in the scribes.

To the mind of the early Church, the attribution of these works to Satan rather than to God was the result of a conscious and deliberate opposition to God. He who blasphemed against the Holy Spirit has identified himself so completely with the kingdom of evil that for him evil is good, ugliness is beauty, and falsehood truth; and so the workings of the Holy Spirit appear to him as madness. According to Dr. Vincent Taylor, "The sin is not any sin against the Holy Spirit, not even a railing judgment uttered in anger or ignorance; nor is it simply the deliberate rejection of better light, with full knowledge that it is light. It is a perversion of spirit which, in defiance of moral values, elects to call light darkness."

From the Christian standpoint, the one absolutely heinous sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

THE BRETHREN OF JESUS

In his next narrative, Mark revealed the primary requirement for membership in the New Israel. When Jesus says, "*Whoever does the Will of God is brother and sister and mother to me*" (Mk 3:35), He proclaimed that love of God is essential for membership in the New Israel. Our love may be colored by emotions and feelings, but essentially it is an operation of the human will. We have often been taught that you reveal who you love by those whose wills you freely accommodate. It is impossible to separate ourselves from our wills. A human being experiences his or her individual identity in terms of his or her will. A person's personal existence is identical with his capacity to express his or her will in the world. One is what one wills! Will always demands a choice--a choice means a sacrifice.

No human being can relinquish the right to will without eventually ceasing to be a human person. Even when we obey the will of another, we must freely choose to obey that will. For our obedience to be healthy and virtuous it must flow from a freely willed decision on our part.

The Will of God remains no mystery for us. Jesus defined God's Will when He was asked, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus replied, "This is the work of God: have faith in the One whom he sent" (Jn 6:28-29). "Whoever puts faith in me believes not so much in me as in Him who sent me" (Jn 12:44). The Will of God is to believe in Jesus Christ--the Word of God. As St. Luke wrote, "My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice!" (Lk 8:21). In other words, it is an obedient faith--a loving faith--that is required of a person to be a true member in the kingdom of God--the New Israel.

It is because loving faith is of the essence of being a Christian that being a Christian is a very lively and enriching experience. It calls us to life, from the very essence of our being. We must choose, not only daily, but hourly to be a Christian. "To hear the Word of God and put it into practice!" It is our free loving choice to do God's will that forms and creates us in both heart and spirit as true brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ--Children of our heavenly Father!

THE NEW ISRAEL

SCRIPTURE READING AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

WHOEVER DOES THE WILL OF GOD IS BROTHER AND SISTER AND MOTHER TO ME. (Mark 3:35)

FIRST DAY: Read Exodus 19:1-25; 24:1-18.

1. How did the Hebrews come to be the People of God?
2. What did God demand in order for them to be His people?
3. What blessings would come to them as the People of God?
4. What purpose did the sacrifice with its sacrificial banquet serve?

SECOND DAY: Read 2 Kings 23:1-27.

1. Why was this second assembly of the People of God necessary?
2. What happened to bring Israel to such a corrupt state?
3. What do you mean by the Church?
4. What do you think leads people to fall away from God and the Church?

THIRD DAY: Read Luke 6:12-13; Mark 3:13-19; John 12:37-50.

1. What does Jesus' spending the night in prayer before choosing the Apostles teach you?
2. What episode in the Old Testament is being recalled in Mark 3:13?
3. What do you see to be the difference between the establishment of the Old and the New Covenants?
4. What are the requirements for being a member of the New Israel?

FOURTH DAY: Read Matthew 16:13-20; Acts 1:15-26; 2:42-47.

1. What was the primary role of the Twelve in the Church?
2. What unique role did Peter occupy among the Twelve?
3. What is the source of Church unity and harmony?
4. What do you see that destroys unity in the Christian Community?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 3:20-30; Luke 11:14-26.

1. What do the relatives and the scribes from Jerusalem symbolize?
2. What do you understand to be the unforgivable sin?
3. How do you understand Luke 11:24-26?
4. How do you demonstrate your devotion to the Holy Spirit?

SIXTH DAY: Read Mark 3:31-35; 1John 3:11-24.

1. What do you see to be the real message in Mark 3:31-35?
2. What does Mark 3:35 mean to you?
3. How do members of the Church build Christian community?
4. How does the Incarnation continue in you?

CHAPTER 5

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

INTRODUCTION

Mark, more than any of the Evangelists, beheld Jesus as “our dear Teacher.” It was characteristic of Jesus to teach. He taught in the synagogue, in the Temple, on the hills, by the sea, from a boat. Mark related that Jesus taught the people because He had compassion for them. Even when Jesus was not teaching it was customary for the disciples to refer to Him as “Teacher”.

THE PARABLES

Jesus taught religious truths to men and women of flesh and blood. As was common with the rabbis of the day, Jesus reached His audience through parables. Jesus was a man of His time, speaking the language of His people. A parable is a heavenly thought clothed with earthly cloth. The creator of a parable takes an abstract truth and clothes it in images from daily experience. At its simplest a parable is a comparison of a spiritual truth with a fact in nature: “*Behold the birds of the air.*” The basic idea is that of comparison. A moral or spiritual truth is compared with the affairs of daily life, on the assumption that what applies in the one sphere is relevant also in the other. The parable simply intends to manifest the truth. It catches the hearer's attention, creates uncertainty as to its meaning, and then stimulates thought and meditation. The parable puzzles people, provoking them into reflection, leading to enlightenment.

A typical parable presents one single point of comparison, such as “*the kingdom of heaven is like a buried treasure.*” The details in the parable are not intended to have independent significance. This distinguishes the parable from the allegory. The essence of an allegory is that it must be interpreted point by point and every single item in an allegory must represent something else. The allegory has been called a description in

code. The Book of Revelation is allegorical, and we need to understand the code in order to interpret it properly.

In the parables we hear the authentic voice of Jesus. They have been called “a fragment of the original rock of tradition”. They transport us into the daily life of Israel in which Jesus lived. As these parables passed from the Semitic environment into the Greek world, some of these parables became allegories.

In Chapter Four, Jesus began to speak in parables to the people. In addition, we see a growing intimacy between Jesus and His disciples. He told the Twelve, “*To you the mysteries of the reign of God have been confided. To the others outside it is all presented in parables*” (Mk 4:11). In this ancient world a mystery was not something that could not be understood, but a thing that was hidden. The mysteries were understood by those who had been initiated, while remaining completely hidden to the unenlightened.

THE SOWER OF THE SEED

The first parable related in Chapter Four is the Sower of the Seed. It is a parable about the earthly life of Jesus, a life that meets with opposition and lack of response. So many of Jesus’ efforts seemed to be futile and useless. Although the life of Jesus may have appeared to be a losing cause, it would not be so in the end. His life would produce an unspeakably rich harvest. He warned his hearers not to judge by what they saw.

It is indeed possible that Jesus desired to give encouragement to His disciples, who were faced with frustrations and set-backs in their own apostolic work. They were not to be discouraged; the sowing had taken place and the harvest would inevitably come. They were to go on having confidence in Jesus and continue sowing the seed, confident that in the end the harvest would come. What appears to be failure in the eyes of the world may be God's method of success.

GROWTH IN THE WORD

We ought to note that the Parable of the Sower began with these words: “*Listen carefully to this*”, and ended with “*let Him who has ears to hear, hear!*” Mark records these words of Jesus, “*Listen carefully to what you*

hear. In the measure you give, you shall receive, and more besides. To those who have, more will be given: for those who have not, what little they have will be taken away” (Mk 4:24-25).

People are encouraged to discover the mysteries of the Kingdom. Since Jesus is the Kingdom, we are invited to know Jesus. It is indicated that a continual growth in the knowledge of Jesus is vital. As one grows in knowledge, his or her commitment to Jesus should increase. As a disciple gives more of self to the study of Jesus and to following His Way, the disciple grows firmer in his or her discipleship. A warning is given about being superficial and careless in ones relationship with the Lord.

ALLEGORY OF THE SOWER

Within Chapter Four, the Sower of the Seed is also presented as an allegory. The “sower” in the parable is not Jesus, but anyone who seeks to teach the Gospel. The seed is the word and the “word” is Jesus--the “word” is the Kingdom. In the activity of sowing, the mind, heart, and spirit of Jesus is presented to the listeners. The seed reveals the secrets of the Kingdom, and is received into the listener’s inner spiritual being--into his or her heart.

Satan is immediately identified as the arch-enemy of the Word and the spreading of the Gospel. His presence is the supreme cause of people failing to believe in Jesus. Every teacher of the Word must realize that the number one source of opposition to the reception of the Word is Satan.

Our Lord tells us in verses sixteen and seventeen that some Christians’ spiritual lives are like a flower in a cranny of a wall. Its joyous life and growth are extremely curtailed by its environment. Springing up suddenly, it blossoms beautifully. But it lacks strength and endurance because it has limited nourishment. Its root system is unable to put its roots down deep to be nourished. When the external environment becomes difficult, the flower in the cranny fades and dies.

When a person comes to Jesus through some sudden spiritual experience without adequate spiritual development, his or her religious fervor and commitment will not endure without help. Good spiritual direction will enable the person to develop healthy spiritual exercises, allowing development of the root system, and growth in faith and love.

To grow and develop as a Christian one must learn to pray properly. This requires more than “saying” prayers and singing hymns. Prayer and meditation establish a spiritual foundation and these activities are the essential work of a Christian life. As we grow in prayer, we will grow in humility. As we increase in humility--the very foundation of holiness--we grow in union with the Lord. The spirit becomes deeply rooted in God—the enduring source of Christian maturity.

THE FALLEN AWAY

Our Lord tells us that some Christians begin well, but end badly--they bear no fruit. Anxieties over life’s demands, and the desire for wealth and the cravings of the flesh choke their spiritual life to death. Worries and anxieties often stem from a poverty of faith. When people spend too much time and energy making sure they are secure, they really do not trust the Heavenly Father to provide. Time and life go by, and God has been crowded out of their lives. Jesus warned that if first things are not put first, the first would end up last. Many people do not hate God they are indifferent to Him, which is a worse state. We can end in Hell for many different reasons, the most common of which is indifference.

Some Christians become so enslaved to their bodily and emotional satisfactions that they live totally physical lives. When people become slaves to their passions, they have neither the desire nor strength to follow the Crucified Christ. Their taste is only for the earthly; they find the spiritual distasteful. Things that feed the spirit such as prayer, religious worship, scriptural reading, and study they find boring. They only find satisfaction in what feeds the senses or gratifies the ego. Our life in the body only reflects the kind of relationship we have with the Heavenly Father.

PERSEVERANCE

The lives of some Christians bear abundant harvest: one thirty-, another sixty-, some a hundred-fold. Who are those who persevere to the end? They are the ones who “*Hear the Word of God and put it into practice.*” The graced ones are those who love God above self, and more than mother, father, husband, wife, children, home and country; the ones who seek first the kingdom of God and His Glory; those to whom Jesus is their Treasure!

In the parable of the farmer scattering the seed, Jesus teaches that the disciple is no more responsible for producing fruitfulness in the hearts of hearers than the farmer is responsible for causing the seed in the ground to germinate and produce fruit.

The disciple of Jesus must do her or his task, and then be patient. Do not become anxious and worried over the results. The disciple must have faith in the seed sown. What follows is not in the hands of the disciple. Now it is the work of the Lord. It is God who gives the increase. A disciple must not be discouraged when one's labor seems to bear no fruit. The harvest comes in God's good time. In the meantime, a disciple must continue confidently and joyfully sowing the good seed, knowing there *will* be the harvest!

THE MUSTARD SEED

In His utter humility, Jesus saw His life like a tiny mustard seed. The kingdom of God had come in Jesus of Nazareth. His humble humanity housed the Presence of God. How insignificant Jesus appeared when compared with the Jewish expectation of their Messiah. Jesus sought to encourage His disciples to accept the divine reality. The Kingdom of God had come in Him, even if He appeared in this world as unimportant as a mustard seed. Yes, the Kingdom of God had an apparently insignificant beginning, like a tiny mustard seed, but it was a divine seed that will produce a rich harvest. However, the seed must die before it will produce *much fruit*.

A LIGHT TO THE WORLD

Jesus spoke of the responsibility of His disciples when He said, "*Is a lamp acquired to be put under a bushel basket or hidden under a bed? Is it not meant to be put on a stand? Things are only to be revealed at a later time; they are covered so as to be brought out into the open*" (Mk 4:21-23). "*You are the light of the world*" (Mt 5:14).

As we have said, Mark, more than any other Evangelist, presented Jesus as "Teacher". He certainly considered teaching an important part of discipleship.

Knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom placed a responsibility upon the disciples to be a light in dark places. The disciples were lamps enkindled by Jesus. They were brought together by Him to impart light in the world to dispel its darkness. The words the Lord later addressed to Paul of Tarsus apply to every disciple of Jesus Christ, *“You are to open the eyes of those to whom I am sending you, to turn them from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18).*

Mark understood that teaching is a vital responsibility of discipleship. He even indicated that the growth and preservation of our own gifts of faith and love depend on our sharing our faith and love with others, *“In the measure you give you shall receive, and more besides” (Mk 4:24).* In the measure we have received--we must give.

Mark left this picture of our Teacher for the disciple to contemplate, *“By means of many such parables He taught them the message in a way they could understand” (Mk 4:33).*

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

BUT THOSE SOWN ON GOOD SOIL ARE THOSE WHO LISTEN TO THE WORD AND ACCEPT IT AND YIELD AT THIRTYFOLD AND SIXTYFOLD AND A HUNDREDFOLD. (Mark 4:20)

FIRST DAY: Read 2Samuel 12:1-15.

1. How would you describe a parable?
2. What do you discover to be the main point of this parable?
3. What effect did this parable produce in King David?
4. What does David's punishment reveal about God's justice?

SECOND DAY: Read Mark 4:1-12; Matthew 13:1-17.

1. What do you see as the main point in this parable?
2. What important lesson does this parable teach you?
3. Why did Jesus speak in parables?
4. What do you think is meant by Matthew 13: 12?

THIRD DAY: Read Mark 4:13-25; Luke 8:11-15.

1. What is the difference between a parable and an allegory?
2. What are the important teachings in the allegory of the Sower?
3. Which of these teachings do you think is most important for you?
4. What is considered as good soil for the Word?

FOURTH DAY: Read 2Peter 1:3-21.

1. According to St. Peter, to what has a Christian been called.
2. What must Christians do in order to assure their call and election?
3. When Peter begins with faith and ends in love what does he teach us in verses five through seven?
4. How do you fulfill your obligation to instruct others?

FIFTH DAY: Read 2Peter 2:1-22.

1. What do verses one and two teach us?
2. What type of Christian does Peter describe in Chapter 2?
3. What warning should these verses carry for us?
4. What do you understand by the teaching in verses 20 through 21?

SIXTH DAY: Read Mark 4:26-34; Matthew 5:14-20.

1. What lesson does Jesus teach us in Mark 4:26-29?
2. In what way does the mustard seed symbolize Jesus?
3. What does verse Mk 4:33 tell us about Jesus as a Teacher?
4. What does it mean to you, "You are the light of the world"?

CHAPTER 6

TOUCH OF FAITH

INTRODUCTION

In our study of the Gospel we are now presented with a series of miracles by Jesus Christ. The ordinary Gospel term for miracles is *dynamis*--an act of power. If the presence of a Divine Being permeates the universe, miracles are possible. Because His presence became incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, miracles are both possible and probable through Jesus.

The Evangelist Mark pictured Jesus as a dynamo of divine power that has entered into the human race. Fundamental to understanding the miracles of Jesus is the understanding of the reality of which St. John spoke, "*We know that we belong to God, while the whole world is in the power of the Evil One*" (1Jn 5:19). Mankind and nature are presented in the Gospel as subjected to evil control. Domination by Satan results in bondage. St. Paul taught that Satan has established domination over all creation, and it awaits deliverance in agony.

By coming into the world, Jesus Christ brought about a confrontation between the power of God and the power of darkness. In Jesus, the kingdom of God confronts the kingdom of darkness. Satan has dominion over the earth and will not yield to God without a fight. In the Temptation of Jesus in the desert Satan confirmed, "*I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms; the power has been given to me and I give it to whomever I wish*" (Lk 4:6).

The two kingdoms are pitted against each other in the public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. The miracles of Jesus were weapons to overthrow Satan and his reign. The coming of God's kingdom will restore order to mankind and nature.

STORM AT SEA

The first miracle we study in Mark is an excellent example of Jesus' meeting the power of Satan in nature. The Scriptures make it clear that the ability to control the sea and subdue its storms displays divine power.

Lord, God of Hosts, who is like you? Mighty are you, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging of the sea; you still the swelling of the waves. (Ps 89:9-10)

In the Scriptures, the image of storms or overwhelming waters is a frequent metaphor for evil forces afflicting the virtuous, from which only God can deliver them. According to the Scriptures, when a person has complete confidence in God, he or she does not doubt God's power to save, even amidst the most terrible storm.

God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in distress. Therefore, we fear not, though the earth be shaken and mountains plunge into the depths of the sea; though its waters rage and foam and the mountains quake at its surging. The Lord of hosts is with us. (Ps 46:1-3,7)

When we compare the behavior of Jesus on the stormy Sea of Galilee against the background of Scripture, we know the answer to the question, "Who can this be that the wind and the sea obey him?" (Mk 4:41). Jesus' behavior revealed the divine presence, and the episode put the Twelve in an unfavorable light--their fear revealed the immaturity of their faith. They do not trust in the Providential care of the Father, and Jesus very plainly expressed his disappointment in them. The Lord chastised His disciples when they did not measure up to the necessary requirements for being men of God. Jesus corrected and rebuked those He loved. He is not always *nice*, but He is always *loving*!

MAD MAN OF GERASA

This particular journey of Jesus and the Twelve ended in an area believed to be Khersa, near Magdala, on the eastern shore, where cliffs and ancient tombs may still be seen. They were immediately met on their arrival by a man who lived in the nearby tombs. According to the description, the man

was more than mad--he was possessed. He was a most frightful character. Jesus stood on the shore quietly praying for the man, "*Unclean spirit come out of this man!*" (Mk 5:8). Jesus demonstrated great compassion for the man and moved to free him. "Jesus asked, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'Legion is my name; for there are hundreds of us'" (Mk 5:9). Six thousand men composed a Roman legion. The name "Legion" expressed the inner turmoil of a man torn apart by numerous uncoordinated impulses and evil forces. No moral unity of will or personality existed to make him a person; he was an aggregate of many chaotic powers and forces of evil.

The point of the miracle was clear when Jesus commissioned the restored man to proclaim God, and the man proclaimed Jesus instead. This man, who now proclaimed that Jesus was a man, "*no one had proved strong enough to tame...*" (Mk .5:4). Indeed, man alone was not strong enough to tame him. That was the point of the miracle.

The miracle was intended to enlighten and encourage later Christian missionaries who would one day be sent to pagan lands and people. They would be required to be aware of the conditions they would face. The man possessed by "Legion" represented the peoples and lands they would encounter. No matter how entrenched and powerful the evil, the missionaries had the power in Jesus' name to overcome and conquer the evil forces and bring the victims to perfect sanity and the peace of God.

Not all people would accept the gift of liberation from evil because of the demands it would make upon their lives. Jesus encouraged His disciples to leave these people to heaven and go to another place. They must not forget Jesus' warning: "*I am sending YOU as lambs among the wolves*" (Lk 10:3).

Where Jesus is not wanted, whatever the reason, He respects the freedom of every person to reject Him. He withdraws, but He doesn't give up. He will still send His ambassadors--His messengers--hoping for a change of heart and openness to His friendship.

TOUCH OF FAITH

Jesus returned with His disciples to the west bank of the sea, and the crowds welcomed Him. In the multitude, stood one lone woman lost in the

sea of humanity. She was a deeply troubled woman. For over twelve years she had suffered from continuous hemorrhage. Such a disease rendered her ritually unclean, impure. For twelve years she had been socially and spiritually alienated from society because it was believed she contaminated all that she touched.

She had heard about Jesus of Nazareth, and what she heard gave her hope and courage. She thought, *“If I can touch but the hem of his garment, I shall get well”* (Mk 5:28). Secretly and fleetingly her hand touched his tunic, and *“the feeling that she was cured of her affliction ran through her whole body”* (Mk 5:29). Many people touched Jesus, but her touch made a difference. She reached out and touched Jesus with hope and faith. She touched with the touch that healed. Tradition relates that the woman was called “Veronica”.

Spiritual power, both good and evil, indeed flows into the physical world. Jesus’ spiritual power brought about physical healing in Veronica. Veronica’s faith allowed the transformation of divine power to the healing force that cured her.

DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS

On this same occasion, Jairus, one of the officials of the synagogue, begged Jesus to come lay hands on his critically ill child. Jairus believed in Jesus as a Healer. Jesus had not yet finished speaking with Veronica when *“there came from the ruler’s house some who said, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why bother the Teacher further?’”* (Mk 5:35). In other words, “It is too late for him to help your daughter; no one but God can do anything for her now.” Turning to the devastated Jairus Jesus said, *“Do not fear, only believe”* (Mk 5:36).

Jesus stressed that in our relationship with God, not only can fear not achieve anything, but it may well impede what God can do. Jesus encouraged Jairus to trust in Him and ignore the messengers of death. At this point, Jesus does not permit the crowd to follow Him; apparently, their faith is not adequate for the occasion.

As Jesus entered the house He said to the mourners, *“Why do you make this din with your wailing? The child is not dead. She is asleep”* (Mk 5:39). “Asleep”

is an early Christian expression for Christian Death. It is death with a small “d” that looks forward to an awakening. It is not the eternal death of which pagans speak. *“The mourners then began to ridicule Him. Then he put them all out” (Mk 5:40)*. Jesus separated Himself from such disbelieving people. This is the fate of all those who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ.

The zenith of Jesus' power and victory over Satan was displayed in the restoration of Jairus' daughter to life. The most powerful effect of Satan was undone by Jesus when He restored life to the dead. As we read in the Book of Wisdom, *“For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of His own nature He made him. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it” (Wis 2:23)*. In the case of Jairus' daughter, the Stronger One is victorious. Mark demonstrated that the power of Jesus goes beyond death. If the power of our faith in Jesus can go beyond death, it brings us eternal life!

TOUCH OF FAITH
SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)

FEAR IS USELESS. WHAT IS NEEDED IS FAITH. (Mark 5:36)

FIRST DAY: Read Psalm 69:1-18; Psalm 107:23-32; Mark 4:35-41.

1. In the light of the Old Testament, what does this miracle reveal about Jesus?
2. According to the Psalms, what should a person's attitude be in time of danger?
3. Why do you think Jesus was so displeased at the disciples' fear?
4. What does Jesus expect from you in times of emotional crisis?

SECOND DAY: Read Mark 5:1-20.

1. What do you see as the main teaching in this miracle?
2. What lesson does this miracle have for apostles and missionaries?
3. What does Jesus' withdrawal at the peoples' request teach about God?
4. Who would the possessed man represent in our society today?

THIRD DAY: Read Mark 5:21-34.

1. What lesson does this miracle teach you?
2. What interesting fact about miraculous cures is revealed in this miracle?
3. What can you learn from the woman known in history as "Veronica"?
4. Why do you think Jesus insisted that she publicly acknowledge the miracle?

FOURTH DAY: Read Acts 4:36 through 5:16.

1. What does this power of Peter reveal to you?
2. What part do you think faith plays in miraculous healing?
3. What should your attitude be toward bodily healing?
4. Can you share an experience where the “touch of faith” resulted in a cure?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 5:34-43; Matthew 8:5-13.

1. What does this miracle reveal about Jesus Christ?
2. What is the difference between the faith of Jairus and the centurion?
3. What does “*Fear is useless. What is needed is faith*” mean to you?
4. How would you describe your feelings about physical death?

SIXTH DAY: Read 2 Kings 4:31-37; Acts 9:31-43; 20:7-12.

1. What does the miracle performed by Peter reveal to you?
2. What did the miracles of Elisha and Paul have in common?
3. What message do you see in the miraculous cures of today?
4. How should you pray for the healing of the sick?

CHAPTER 7

PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Six, St. Mark related the return of Jesus to His home town of Nazareth. The trip was disastrous. Nazareth symbolized the nation of Israel. The mystery of why Jesus' own people rejected Him, and the Gentiles so eagerly accepted Him, deeply perplexed the early Church. The Church was pressed to explain how Jesus could be the Messiah of Israel and yet be rejected by the Jews. In Chapters Nine through Eleven of his epistle to the Romans, St. Paul expressed best the early Church's understanding of the problem and its answer to that haunting question, "Why did the Jews fail to recognize their Messiah?"

Paul came to see the rejection of Jesus as part of the mysterious plan of God, a plan foretold in the Scriptures. The Messiah came to save Israel from its sins, not to fulfill its royal expectations for the Messiah. Jesus came not to satisfy people but to save them. Because of the infinite atonement made by Jesus Christ for sinful humanity, He became the Savior of the World.

The Jewish religious leaders could not see this need of salvation. They put their faith in Israel itself and its religious practices to fulfill the demands of divine justice. As the Pharisees and the Sadducees failed to understand their need for salvation through the Messiah, they rejected Jesus of Nazareth.

Mark saw no basis for the rejection of Jesus other than the willful blindness and prejudice of these religious leaders. Even though confronted by the wisdom and power of Jesus, they cannot rise above the evidence of His being a tradesman and a person of lowly birth: "*Can anything good come from Nazareth?*" (*Jn 1:46*). Satan used the humility of

Jesus as a snare and stumbling stone for the proud. It was indeed a prideful spirit that questioned, “*Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary...?*” And they found him too much for them” (Mk 6:2-3). They heard the wisdom; they saw the wonders, but they did not want to believe. This led to a refusal to believe.

By relating this episode, Mark intended to show the true character and superficiality of Israel's rejection of Jesus by the authorities. This rejection began early in the ministry of Jesus and culminated with His death, which only confirmed the error of Christ's enemies.

TRUE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Mark related the sad consequence of their disbelief, “*He could work no miracles there, apart from curing a few who were sick by laying hands on them, so much did their lack of faith distress him*” (Mk 6:5-6). We certainly know very little about the healing ministry, but we do know that God made us free and He does not violate the freedom of our wills. Normally, cooperation between the sick person and the healer is important. In the Third Century, St. Cyprian noted, as the healing ministry within the Church subsided, “The sins of Christians have weakened the power of the Church.”

Christian Faith is a magnificent gift. As Jesus told Peter, “*Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona! No mere man has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father*” (Mt 16:17). Faith is the Pearl of Great Price! It is not merely an intellectual assent to the truths revealed by God, but it is the response of the whole person. It is a thinking, feeling, and willing response. Through such a total response, a person comes into a conscious, personal relationship with God. When thinking has penetrated into the mystery of faith as far as it can go, when feelings of love and confidence are as great as they can be, and action is as courageous and dynamic as the will can achieve, the spirit arrives at maximum faith.

True faith can never be anti-intellectual. Nothing that is true can undermine true faith in God, who is the source of all truth. To reject truth, no matter where it is found or how contradictory to cherished

opinions and ideas it may be, is disloyal to the Holy Spirit--the Spirit of Truth. It is the work of the mind to embrace the revealed truth. The First Commandment teaches us to love the Lord God with our *whole mind*. A true spirit of faith never encourages mindless love or service of God.

Simple Gospel faith does not come easy. Faith is a power which must develop within us and be purified. We do not have the happiness of beholding Jesus as did the Apostles. Jesus confirmed how blessed they were, "*Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it*" (Mt 13:16-17). The truths that could have come in a moment when beholding and hearing Jesus must now come through prayerful study and meditation. But, the vision of faith that comes through arduous study also brings happiness.

Prayerful faith creates a divine milieu, creating the environment that enables God to draw near enough to a man or woman to work within their lives. This is the state in which God may express His merciful love within our lives. God is not the reluctant visitor; it is our lack of faith that prevents Him from entering when He knocks.

MISSION OF THE TWELVE

When Jesus sent forth the Twelve on mission, we saw the future mission of the Church. Jesus delayed sending them until He had spent time in a close relationship with them. His instruction to them included the importance of an immediate response, for there was a sense of urgency. They were to travel light and fast. The instructions He gave to the Twelve were intended to be used for preaching in Israel. But, as Paul made his way through the Gentile world he did not follow those instructions; they would have impeded his progress. Here we have an example of the spiritual maturity required to be able to discern between the "letter of the law" and the "spirit of the law." Paul used whatever means available to spread the Gospel as fast and as far as possible.

DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Mark interrupted his narrative of Jesus and inserted a picturesque story about the arrest and death of John the Baptist. It had been John's mission to proclaim divine truth. When the light of this truth revealed the darkness of men's deeds, it evoked either repentance or hatred. The mission of John led to his death, which was brought about by the political power of the land, Herod, and the personal hatred and cunning of one evil woman--Herodias. John went to his death with no intervention by God into this sad and evil.

There is little doubt that Mark intended this episode as instruction to the Roman Christians. By fulfilling Jesus' command to be the "light of the world", the new Christians had become the object of state persecution. They were expected to die as men and women of faith, and not to expect some divine intervention to save them. Divine rescue had not been forthcoming for John, and it had not been there for Jesus, who had prayed, "*If it is possible Father, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou will*" (Mt 26:39). It was not possible for Jesus, and it would not be so for His disciples. A Christian must die with his or her courage and faith intact. "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*" (Lk 23:46).

RHYTHM OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

Mark picked up his narrative of Jesus with the return of the Apostles from their mission journey. He hinted at the intimate and personal relationship that Jesus and the Apostles shared when he recorded, "*The apostles returned to Jesus and reported to Him all that they had done and what they had taught*" (Mk 6:30). They were like excited children relating to a parent the special events of an exciting weekend.

People are brought into discipleship not only to share in an intimate relationship with Jesus, but to work arduously in His vineyard. People who are interested in the person of Jesus, but not in His work, cannot be true disciples of the Lord. They are not part of His close community; they are part of "the crowd" as Mark called them.

There is a rhythm and balance to Christian Life. We noted this rhythm in Chapter Six: a disciple did the work assigned (the Lord's work), then he withdrew from the work to discuss its effects with the Lord. He told Him what he did and taught and then he remained silent before the Lord and listened. Jesus may tell a disciple to withdraw to some deserted place and be alone with Him, or He may correct his outlook on his work. *"Nevertheless, do not rejoice so much in the fact that the devils are subjected to you; but rejoice that your names are inscribed in heaven"* (Lk 10:20). Our Lord may invite his disciple to take a little boat trip or a stroll along the seashore. Recreation is important for a disciple; resting awhile enables the powers to be recharged and refreshed. It may be easier for some to recreate if they remember the word really means to "re-create". This is why it is important to re-create in the Lord. He alone is the Creator and Re-creator!

MIRACLE OF THE LOAVES AND FISHES

Jesus taught His disciples that the degree of their commitment to Him separated them from the crowd, *"You are the light of the world! You are the salt of the earth!"* (Mt 5:14,13). It is important that they maintain their separation, but the "crowd" is not to be rejected nor despised. The separation between the disciples and the crowd is only one of degree--the disciples are on a different and higher level of relationship with both Jesus and the heavenly Father. However, the disciples must not consider themselves as an elite or superior group. Jesus taught His disciples what ought to be their attitude toward the crowd, *"He pitied them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things"* (Mk 6:34b). As for the interpersonal relationships between the disciples we read, *"And Jesus called them to Him and said, '...whoever would be great among you must be your servant...whoever would be first among you must be slave of all'"* (Mk 10:42-44).

In the scene preceding the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the disciples displayed their lack of involvement and love for the crowd. They saw the situation as more than they could handle, and they had no intention of tackling the problem. The best thing to do was send the problem away. Jesus checkmated their decision. Jesus did not let them escape their responsibility, *"You give them something to eat"* (Mk 6:37).

The Apostles' lack of faith in Jesus was their worst defect. Even if they had had a mustard seed of faith and placed it in His hands, they would have been overwhelmed by the miraculous effects that would have occurred. When St. Teresa of Avila was asked how much money she possessed to establish a new convent, she replied, "Two ducats!" When she was told it was an impossible situation, she replied, "Two ducats and Teresa are nothing. Two ducats, Teresa and Jesus, are sufficient!"

The miracle of feeding the multitude took place in a desert region, and was intended to recall the story of Exodus when Yahweh fed His people with *manna*, the bread from heaven. The miracle also recalled the time Elisha distributed twenty barley loaves among a hundred men, "*So he set it before them. And they all ate and had some left, according to the word of the Lord*" (2Kings 4:44). This miracle, no doubt, intended to signify that Jesus was the fulfillment of both the Law and Prophets.

The early Christian readers would have noted that the actions of Jesus at the multiplication of the loaves was a preview of His action at the Last Supper, and a reflection of their own Eucharistic celebrations. The miracle in the desert anticipated the Last Supper and the institution of the Holy Eucharist. God had not left the Children of Israel hungry and abandoned in the desert, and Jesus had not left His followers in their pilgrimage through the desert of life—He nourished them with His very Body and Blood.

A WALK ON WATER

In the scene following the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Mark indicated that the Apostles failed to understand the message of the miracle. Their spiritual insight was no better than that of the crowd. This was a serious defect and would have damaging effects in the ministry.

It was night on a stormy sea, and the Apostles were alone in their boat when they beheld a vision of Jesus walking across the sea. When Mark noted that Jesus "*meant to pass by them*" (Mk 6:48b), he intended to recall similar episodes from the Old Testament. Moses on Mt. Sinai beheld the glory of God "*passing by*" (Ex 33:22), and later, Elijah was told to stand

on the same mountain, *“and behold, the Lord passed by...”* (1Kings 19:11b). This episode of Jesus’ walking upon the water demonstrated His divinity. Because of the Apostles’ lack of faith they beheld only a “ghost” of Jesus and not the divine reality.

Perhaps Mark desired his own Roman Community to see in this episode the results of their own behavior. They felt God had abandoned them to a terrible reality, and they doubted the reality of Jesus in their lives. They needed not to be afraid, knowing that Jesus is “I Am!” and *“I am with you always, even until the end of the world”* (Mt 28:20). They needed to recall His words, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and also faith in me!* (Jn 14:1).

PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED. HAVE FAITH IN GOD AND FAITH IN ME. (John 14:1)

FIRST DAY: Read Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:14-30.

1. What does Jesus' rejection in Nazareth symbolize?
2. Why do you think Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah?
3. What does "*they found him too much for them*" mean to you?
4. What does it teach you that Jesus could work no miracles in Nazareth?

SECOND DAY: Read Mark 6:7-13; Matthew 10:1-20.

1. What is the role of a disciple of Jesus?
2. What do you understand by Matthew 10:16?
3. What is the difference between being a friend of Jesus or an acquaintance of Jesus?
4. How would you classify yourself?

THIRD DAY: Read Mark 6:14-29.

1. What is meant by saying the Christian Faith involves the whole person?
2. Why must our faith not be anti-intellectual?
3. What does the fate of John the Baptist teach you?
4. How would you describe a mature faith in God?

FOURTH DAY: Read Mark 6:30-33; Luke 10:1-24.

1. How do these writings display the intimate relationship of the disciples with Jesus?
2. How would you describe a balance and rhythm of Christian life?
3. What is the significance of Luke 10:16?
4. How should you see your own life as a disciple of Jesus?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 6:34-44; John 6:1-14.

1. What kind of people is being symbolized by the “crowd”?
2. What should be the Christians’ attitude toward the “crowd”?
3. What do the words, “*You give them something to eat*”, mean to you?
4. What lessons do you learn from this miracle?

SIXTH DAY: Read Exodus 33:12-23; 1 Kings 19:1-18; Mark 6:45-56.

1. How do these readings help you understand Mark 6:48-49?
2. What do you see to be the significance of this miracle?
3. What does this episode in Mark teach you?
4. Is Jesus a reality or phantom in your life? Explain.

CHAPTER 8

MESSAGE TO THE GENTILES

INTRODUCTION

Nothing was further from the Spirit of Jesus than the Pharisaic spirit. A meeting between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees was programmed to create tension, hostility, and rejection. Jesus described the Pharisees as “hypocrites”, which originally referred to an actor who recited dialogue on a stage. It later became a word applied to people who made life a stage where they acted with no sincerity behind what they said or did.

When pleasing God became no more than keeping rules and regulations, with no regard to the feelings of the human heart, religion became hypocrisy. When a person outwardly observes the demands of religion but inwardly opposes the spirit behind the laws, he or she is guilty of hypocrisy.

Jesus regarded the Law, given by God, as morally binding upon people. However, He rejected the oral laws imposed by the Scribes as the traditions of men, which actually undermined the true spirit of the Law. Jesus approached the Torah with godly authority, and placed the spirit of the Law above the letter of the Law. He emphasized certain aspects of the Law to be of greater importance and more binding upon the conscience of men and women.

MORALITY OF JESUS

Jesus told the Pharisees, “*You have made a fine art of setting aside God's commandments in the interest of keeping your traditions! ...Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites*” (Mk 7:9,6). Elaborate regulations and traditions of men created self-satisfaction in those who observed them, but they had smothered the very purpose of God's law--the joyful and

humble worship of God by His people. The oral law with its burdensome rules contradicted the divine intention.

Jesus summoned the crowd again and said to them:

Hear me, all of you, and try to understand. Nothing that enters a man from outside can make him impure; that which comes out of him, and only that, constitutes impurity. (Mk 7:14-15)

This is one of the most revolutionary statements uttered by Jesus. Jesus proclaimed that only persons can be religiously clean or unclean—not things. No Jew believed this at the time of Christ. No orthodox Jew believes it today. This principle destroyed, with a prophetic blow, the terrible burden from which all ancient religions suffered: that certain objects of nature were ritually unclean, and they rendered men and women unclean and unacceptable to God.

With one single statement Jesus repealed a principle for which Jews had suffered and died. Small wonder it was difficult for the disciples to understand--it took great faith in the word of Jesus to accept it, and it demanded the same faith in Jesus as in God!

Because the human person is a moral and spiritual being, true religious defilement is both immoral and spiritual. What renders a human person unclean in the eyes of God proceeds from within a person--out of the deep recesses of the human heart: *“that which comes out of him, and only that, constitutes impurity” (Mk 7:16).*

Wicked designs come from the deep recesses of the human heart: acts of fornication, theft, murder, adulterous conduct, greed, maliciousness, deceit, sensuality, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, an obtuse spirit. All these evils come from within and render a person impure. (Mk 7:21-23)

Those “wicked designs” come from the deep recesses of the heart and are a product of both mind and will. They are not merely wicked thoughts, but evil plans giving birth to evil deeds.

We read in Matthew that the disciples told Jesus “*Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?*” Jesus replied to the disciples:

Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them go their way; they are blind leaders of the blind. If one blind man leads another, both will end in a pit.

(Mt 15:12-14)

JESUS AND THE GENTILES

In the first years of Christianity, many Gentiles must have felt as if they were second class citizens in the kingdom of God. The full acceptance of the Gentiles into the Christian Community came slowly. Peter's action of receiving the Gentile Cornelius and his household into the Church had to be justified more than once. Many Jewish Christians demanded that Gentile converts become both Jewish and Christian; they demanded converts to observe the entire Mosaic Law. Paul strenuously fought against this, and the Council of Jerusalem, held around 50 AD, upheld the teachings of Paul.

Mark intended to show that Paul's attitude had a foundation in Jesus' own life. Mark presented Jesus entering a Gentile area. The fame of Jesus had spread beyond Israel. Mark related that a Greek woman, Syro-Phoenician by birth, had heard of Jesus and came to Him seeking a cure for her possessed daughter. This woman was a symbolic representation of the Gentile world. Her background was pagan. Jews did not associate with pagans, as they were considered unclean in the eyes of God. The Jews were the children of God, and pagans, because of their vices and practices, were considered no better than dogs.

There was a real spiritual and religious distinction between Jews and pagans. Jesus stressed this distinction when he said to the woman, “*Let the sons of the household satisfy themselves first. It is not right to take food of the children and throw it to the dogs*” (Mk 7:27).

Jesus had been sent by the Father as Messiah to the Jews. The prophets foresaw that in the Messianic days God's grace and spirit would be extended to the Gentiles. The Greek woman understood her position

before God. She agreed with Jesus' statement, but she also perceived that the Gentiles are lost without this Jewish Messiah, for He is, indeed, the Savior of the World: "*Salvation comes from the Jews*" (Jn 4:22).

We have only two miracles in the Synoptic gospels in which a healing miracle occurred from a distance: the cure of the servant of the Centurion, a gentile; and the cure of the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman. Saint Augustine saw a relationship between these two miracles. Two pagans had come to Jesus and He healed their sick by a word. The two healings symbolized the day when the personal presence of Jesus would be absent in the world, but Jesus would live among us in His Word.

At this point, Mark introduced the healing of a Gentile man who was deaf and hardly able to speak. Mark indicated the personal ministry of Jesus in this healing and His sensitivity to the man's condition. Jesus used sign language to communicate with him. The man responded to Jesus and his ears were opened. He could really hear for the first time! Regardless of Jesus' admonition to remain silent, he and his friends gave praise to God.

The symbolism of the miracle is found in the ears of this Gentile man that were opened to hear Jesus, and his mouth to praise God. Jesus had pleaded with the Jews, "*Let him who has ears to hear, hear!*" This miracle emphasized Jesus' personal concern for the Gentiles and their overwhelming acceptance of Him, while on the other hand, His own people continued to close their ears to Him and reject Him.

FEEDING THE FOUR THOUSAND

Mark narrated a second miracle of multiplication of loaves and fishes. This appearance of two such miracles in the Gospel troubled many scholars. The similarity between the two accounts suggested that there existed several versions of the one miracle. This was certainly likely, but evidently Mark had his own reason for recording the second miracle. The first miracle portrayed Jesus as the new Moses, feeding the people of Israel. The five loaves symbolized the five books of the Torah, and the twelve baskets represented the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The second miracle occurred in Gentile territory and fed Gentiles. The number "seven" that appeared in this account may have symbolized the gifts of the Holy Spirit that were to be received fully by the Gentiles.

Since the miracle symbolized the Eucharist and the Last Supper, it also proclaimed the truth that Jesus died for all people, so that He would become the Bread of Heaven for the poor of the earth who moved His heart with pity, in both time and eternity.

Jesus returned to His own people on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. By the encounter which followed, Mark reminded his readers of the continuing hostility toward the ministry of Jesus by the Jewish officials. Despite all that Jesus had done, the Pharisees still demanded some sign from heaven so that they could believe in Him. No doubt, by “a sign from heaven” the Pharisees meant some overpowering miracle that would overcome all opposition and compel belief in Him.

Faith is a gift from God. Faith enables us to know the presence and power of God in our lives, without the evidence that satisfies the human faculties of seeing, hearing, touching and understanding. When a person demands signs and wonders in order to accept the reality of God or Jesus Christ, he or she chooses not to live by faith but live in the flesh. Faith is rejected, and God must meet him or her on their own ground--on the human level. God must make Himself heard, seen, felt and examined in order to be acceptable. God must satisfy the human need to know and understand. This is not faith! Faith is a spiritual power that enables a person to perceive and experience God in a way that is beyond the evidence of the senses. Faith is the Spirit of God's own witness to the human spirit. Faith is the supernatural gift given by God in order that a person may truly know God.

When people refuse to seek God through faith, and demand that God meet them on their own turf with signs and wonders that prove the existence of God, He not only refuses them, but He abandons them to their disbelief.

Persons seeking signs and wonders will find them. However, the signs and wonders will not come from God. *“False messiahs and prophets will appear--performing signs and wonders to mislead, if it were possible, even the chosen. So be constantly on guard! I have told you about it beforehand” (Mk 13:22).*

MESSAGE TO THE GENTILES

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

NOTHING THAT ENTERS A MAN FROM OUTSIDE CAN MAKE HIM IMPURE; ONLY THAT WHICH COMES OUT OF HIM, AND ONLY THAT, CAN MAKE HIM IMPURE. (Mark 7:15)

FIRST DAY: Read Deuteronomy Chapter 14.

1. What was the divine purpose behind pure and impure food?
2. What motivated the Jews to keep these laws?
3. What, for them, was the evil effect of breaking these laws?
4. Who alone has the right to change such rules and regulations?

SECOND DAY: Read Mark 7:1-23.

1. How would you describe the religious spirit of the Pharisees?
2. How did Jesus' spirit differ from that of the Pharisees?
3. What does it mean, in a religious sense, to be hypocritical?
4. Would you say your own spirit is more of Jesus or of the Pharisees?

THIRD DAY: Read Acts 11:1-18; Galatians 2:11-14; Colossians 2:16-23.

1. What problem faced Gentile converts on entering the Church?
2. What problem faces Paul in Galatians 2:11-14?
3. What do you think is meant by Acts 11:9?
4. What old spirit still clung to many members of the early Church?

FOURTH DAY: Read Acts 15:1-21.

1. What did Peter decree at the Council of Jerusalem?
2. What does the action of Peter reveal to you about the Church?
3. What kind of faith in Jesus was manifested in this action?
4. What is Peter saying to you in Acts 15:11?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 7:24-37.

1. What does the Syro-Phoenician woman symbolize in Mark?
2. What do Jesus' words to the woman reveal about the Gentiles' condition?
3. What does the woman's attitude towards Jesus teach you about your own?
4. Why is it so difficult for Jesus to open the ears of people?

SIXTH DAY: Read Mark 8:1-13; Matthew 12:38-42; Luke 11:29-32.

1. What do you see is the symbolic meaning in Jesus' feeding the 4000?
2. What message does Mark seek to convey to the Gentile Christians?
3. Why is it truly a weakness in faith to seek signs and wonders from God?
4. What do you think happens in people lives who insist on such things to sustain their faith?

CHAPTER 9

EYE OF THE SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION

In order to be a good counselor, it is said that one must have more than two ears. One must possess a third ear to hear what is not being said. In order to be a good Christian, one must not only have a third ear but a third eye. What is needed is the eye of the spirit. You must be able to see what the eye cannot behold to see the reality of God in this world. Bodily eyes rest upon the physical dimension of beings. The eye of the spirit penetrates the outer shell and beholds the inner reality--the spiritual foundation of being, the domain of divine reality. The Book of Wisdom teaches, "*For your imperishable spirit is in all things!*" (Wis 12:1).

The Scriptures do not excuse people for being unable to know God's reality and power. If a person has not come to knowledge of God, it is due to a blameworthy and perverse spirit. As St. Paul expressed it:

Since the creation of the world, his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and divinity, has been clearly perceived in the things he has made. Therefore men are without excuse, for although they certainly had knowledge of God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks ... The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who, in this perversity of theirs, suppress the truth. (Rm 1:20-21, 18)

BLINDNESS OF THE DISCIPLES

It is against such a background that Mark saw the disbelief of the Jewish authorities, and the peril the disciples were facing by failing to come to fullness of faith in Jesus. It is not simply a matter of stupidity, but sinfulness. If it is inexcusable for man to fail to recognize the presence of God in the created beauties of the universe, how much more culpable

and blameworthy is he or she for failing to see God in His very Incarnation--Jesus of Nazareth!

Mark continued to demonstrate the serious spiritual condition of the disciples and Jesus' continued struggle to bring them to faith. Jesus instructed them, "*Keep your eyes open! Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod*" (Mk 8:15). Yeast, or "leaven", symbolized evil for the Jews. Yeast was symbolic of corruption and unholiness. Jesus saw that the teachings of the Pharisees and their pietistic attitudes were alienating some of His disciples from Himself. Jesus sought to protect His disciples against the evil in their environment, as no one is immune to the environment in which one must dwell. All the disciples received a prudent warning against seeking religious instruction from unsound and dubious sources. They who drink from every well will sooner or later be poisoned.

We are morally obliged to avoid any person, place, or thing that is a needless occasion of sin for us. Infidelity and apostasy are most serious sins. We ought to be very careful from what well we drink. We do well to keep in mind the words of Paul to the Elders of Ephesus, "*Keep watch over yourselves ... From your own number, men will present themselves distorting the truth and leading astray any who follow them. Be on guard, therefore*" (Acts 26:28-30).

Not every teacher or preacher who proclaims "Jesus is Lord" accepts the lordship of Jesus. Remember, to destroy the power of the truth, it is only necessary to distort the truth!

Jesus sought to make the disciples grasp the seriousness and danger of their situation by asking them the question: "*Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?*" (Mk 8:17-18). He sought to force them to see how close their spiritual condition was to that of the Pharisees, who "*had closed their minds against him.*" This was a sinful condition. Jesus labored for a spiritual breakthrough--a spiritual awakening in the Apostles.

HEALING THE BLIND MAN

The healing of a deaf man and the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida were two perfect illustrations for Mark to indicate the divine work involved in bringing people to the fullness of spiritual insight. Only the miraculous power of Jesus opened the ears and eyes of these men; in their sinful condition they could not come to faith in Jesus Christ without a miracle of God's grace. Jesus sought, step-by-step, to bring His disciples to the fullness of revelation.

For the disciple, there is no end to the unfolding of the mystery of Divine Beauty. A Christian's life is a pilgrimage into the divine reality that continues lifelong, until he or she enters into eternity with eyes wide open. Only then will we know as we are known.

These two miracles are not only symbols of the slow process to faith, but a prophetic sign of what finally begins to take place in the Apostles.

THE MESSIAH

The Jews expressed their messianic hopes in a series of popular religious writings called *apocalypses*, a Greek word meaning "unveiling". In apocalyptic writings the future was unveiled by foretelling the events to come. In these works, Jewish political hopes and desire found expression. The writings taught that the time before the coming of the Messiah would be one of great tribulation in which the whole world would suffer physical and moral chaos. This would be the birth pangs for the coming of the Messianic Age. Elijah would return and restore order before the coming of the Messiah. *Messiah* meant "the anointed One". The word *Christ* is the Greek equivalent of Messiah. When Jesus is called the Christ, it infers that He is the Messiah, anointed by Yahweh as King of Israel.

Some of the people believed that the Messiah would be the Son of David, but the more popular belief was that the Messiah would be a superhuman, suddenly appearing in history to vindicate the Jewish Nation and bring it to worldly glory. This Messiah would be the most destructive warrior in all history, destroying the enemies of God and of the Jews. Following upon this destruction a New Jerusalem would arise and all the dispersed children of Israel would return from the four corners of the world. Israel would be the center of the world. All nations

would be subjected to its dominion. A new age of eternal peace and goodness would come upon the earth.

Against such a glorious background, it is understandable that Jesus was extremely cautious about making any public proclamation of being the Messiah. Such a proclamation would have created an undesirable reaction among the people. In the divine plan, the role of the Messiah was much different, and would be a bitter disappointment to many people.

CHRISTIAN FAITH

Jesus turned to the Twelve and emphatically demanded of them, “*And who do you say that I am?*” (Mk 8:29). The disciples had to decide where Jesus stood with them. He did not tell them who He was. If they were to have true faith in Him, that faith must be rooted in the grace of their spirit. True faith flows from the inner light of grace revealing to the spirit the reality of the divine presence, and the conscious acceptance of that reality.

How necessary is inner reflection and quiet meditation to mature faith! We read in Luke, “*Mary treasured all these things and reflected upon them in her heart*” (Lk 2:19). A human experience of the divine is the handmaid of faith, but the gift of grace to the spirit is the mother of faith. However, the spirit must be docile and opened to grace, and reflect upon its religious experience in the light of grace. Religious faith is truly both a divine and human act!

The disciples had already had adequate religious experiences, and finally Jesus awaited an answer from them. What has been the true foundation of their relationship with Him? There was a reflective silence. Suddenly the lips of the Apostle Simon bar Jonah gave utterance for the first time to what his spirit had perceived. Emphatically he replied, “*You are the Messiah!*” (Mk 8:29). The crisis had passed. The Church had arrived at a true faith in Jesus of Nazareth: He is the Christ. The Church will forever express this faith by calling Him “Jesus Christ!”

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

Mark's main point in this narration was not Peter's profession of faith of Jesus as the Messiah, but the revelation that followed in which Jesus revealed the true role of the Messiah, *"And He began to teach them that the Son of Man had to suffer much, to be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, to be put to death and rise three days later. He said these things quite plainly"* (Mk. 8:31-32).

At this point we have come to the halfway point of the Gospel, to the very heart and essence of St. Mark's gospel account.

The Apostles have received a startling revelation, and Jesus immediately imposed silence upon them, *"He gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him"* (Mk 8:30). From this point on Mark's Gospel account takes a different direction as it reveals the true role of the Jewish Messiah. The Apostles were silenced. Even though they had received a divine revelation, they did not yet understand what has been revealed. The source of divine truth must also be the source of enlightened instruction. People have a habit of understanding divine truth in the light of human understanding.

Mark followed Peter's confession of faith with a sharp rebuke by Jesus. After Jesus had spoken, Peter had immediately interpreted his spiritual insight by the light of his own mind under the force of his own need, *"Peter then took him aside and began to remonstrate with him"* (Mk 8:32). Jesus informed him that his interpretation is diabolic. *"Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men"* (Mk 8:13). Jesus revealed that both the way of man and the way of the devil are opposed to the way of God.

What a warning and caution Christians have here! Even if an inspiration comes from God, the interpretation of the inspiration may be ungodly.

Jesus had clearly expounded the doctrine of the Cross, which is so frightening and unacceptable to the human spirit, and Peter mirrored the natural reaction of all people. Mark clearly indicated that it was not a doctrine for disciples only, but for the whole world when he wrote, *"He summoned the crowd with his disciples"* and to them all He preached the doctrine of the Cross:

1. If any man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross, and follow my steps,

2. For whoever would preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will preserve it.

3. For what profit does a man show who gains the whole world and destroys himself in the process? What can a man offer in exchange for his life?

4. For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this faithless and corrupt age, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes with the holy angels in his Father's glory. (Mk 8:34-38)

The human person is a spiritual being that expresses itself through physical and psychic dimensions and, more importantly, develops or destroys its life as it does so. At death a person sheds these two dimensions as a snake its skin and the butterfly its cocoon, and there stands the true self--a changeless and immutable self. In a sense, an angel or devil forever. Albeit, always a human angel or a human devil.

When Jesus asked us to *die* to self, it is to the *illusion* of self that we must die in order that our *true* self may come to life--to eternal life. Our problem, here and now, is to obtain the direction and grace to live our lives in such a way that when physical death occurs, we will not have lost the opportunity for eternal happiness. The doctrine of Jesus--the Doctrine of the Cross--is the answer to life, for now and for eternity

EYE OF THE SPIRIT

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

WHOEVER WOULD SAVE HIS LIFE WILL LOSE IT, BUT WHOEVER LOSES HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE AND THE GOSPEL'S WILL PRESERVE IT. (Mark 8:35)

FIRST DAY: Read Wisdom 11:23-12:2; 13:1-9.

1. What does Wisdom 12:1 reveal to you about your own life?
2. What do you think is meant by spiritual vision?
3. What do the Scriptures teach about spiritual blindness?
4. How can we be guilty of spiritual blindness in everyday life?

SECOND DAY: Read Galatians 5:7-10; 1Corinthians 5:6-13; Mark 8:14-21.

1. What is the spiritual danger for the disciples at this time?
2. What does yeast symbolize in Mark 8:14-16?
3. How does the teaching in Mark 8:15 apply to your life?
4. Why must we be prudent about where we seek religious education?

THIRD DAY: Read Jeremiah 5:20-25; Ezekiel 12:1-2; Mark 8:22-26.

1. What is the connection between the healing of the deaf man and the blind man?
2. What do these miracles teach us about faith?
3. What part does the person play in coming to faith?
4. Why should a Christian always seek to grow in knowledge of their faith?

FOURTH DAY: Read Mark 8:27-30; Matthew 16:13-20.

- 1. Summarize in your own words the popular Jewish concept of the Messiah at the time of Jesus?**
- 2. What is the origin of the word “Christ” and what is its meaning?**
- 3. Why is this section considered the climax of Mark's gospel account?**
- 4. Why did Jesus prohibit the proclamation of His being the Messiah?**

FIFTH DAY: Read Isaiah 53:1-12; Mark 8:31-33; Matthew 16:21-23.

- 1. Why should all private revelation be submitted to the discernment of the Christian Community?**
- 2. What is the danger of following one's own vision without proper discernment?**
- 3. What mistake did Peter make in his relationship with Jesus?**
- 4. What does Jesus seek to teach in Mark 8:31?**

SIXTH DAY: Read Mark 8:34-38; Matthew 16:24-28; 1Cor. 1:18-25.

- 1. How would you describe the Doctrine of the Cross?**
- 2. What does Mark 8:35 mean to you?**
- 3. How can you daily embrace the mystery of the Cross in your life?**
- 4. What is the reward both here and eternity for living according to such a doctrine?**

CHAPTER 10

SON OF MAN

INTRODUCTION

Among the titles applied to Jesus, “Son of Man” originated with Himself. In the original Hebrew *bar nasha*, meaning “The Man”, was translated into Greek as “Son of Man” and so passed into the English text. In Aramaic, it could carry the meaning merely of a human being. Jesus’ calling Himself *bar nasha* could have implied to His listener that he was but a mere man. It was an expression much safer than “Messiah”.

“Son of Man” was a title capable of conveying the divine origin of Jesus as expressed in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, the Word made Flesh. Certain apocalyptic writers understood the phrase in the sense of a supernatural man, pre-existing in heaven with God from all eternity, who was destined to come on the clouds to exercise judgment as the Agent and Representative of God. Nevertheless, it is highly probable that Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man in order to identify His life and mission with the concept expressed in Ezekiel. Son of Man is used eighty-seven times in the prophetic work of Ezekiel, which aptly expressed Jesus’ divine commission to serve in lowliness and suffering. The description of the Son of Man in Ezekiel parallels closely the life of Jesus.

It was difficult for the early Church to separate the concept of Jesus before the Resurrection from Jesus after the Resurrection. The “Easter faith” and vision of the early Church constantly flowed into their presentation of the earthly life of Jesus. As a result, we have a somewhat paradoxical presentation of Jesus. He appeared as the Son of Man of the apocalyptic writings in which the Son of Man was the Representative of God on earth, the ultimate Judge of the world who has authority on earth to forgive sins and was the lord of the Sabbath. On the other hand,

He also appeared as the Son of Man of Ezekiel and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.

By calling Himself "the Man", Jesus identified completely with humanity. Yet, it is difficult for us today, trained in the concept of Jesus as Son of God, to appreciate how utterly Jesus identified with us. When John described the Incarnation, he spoke of the Word being made flesh. The Greek word used for flesh is *sarx*. It implied taking on much more than the human body. It implied assuming a humanity touched by sin with all its built-in alienation and rebelliousness to God. The very fact of God's Son assuming humanity hurled Him into a life of pain and suffering. The Book of Hebrews plainly expressed this truth when it said that Jesus "*was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned*" (Heb 4:15). The life of Jesus was sinless, but apparently His life was not free from the effects of sin. If so, how could He have been tempted? How could He have died?

Jesus identified Himself with human beings in order that we could identify with Him. The truly extraordinary thing about His human life was the way in which Jesus clung to and fulfilled the will of God: "*He humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a Cross!*" (Phil. 2:8). The entire life of Jesus was summed in the one word "obedience". His humility was the foundation of His obedience.

It is not in the accomplishment of miracles and wonders that we truly imitate Jesus, but in our obedience to the will of God. By the grace of God the imitation of Christ is not beyond us. Our lives assume a Christian character through humility and obedience.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

When an event in Jesus' life demanded the utmost secrecy, Jesus involved only the needed number of legal witnesses. Jesus climbed to the top of a high mountain, taking only Peter, James, and John with Him. Luke wrote, "*While he was praying, his face changed in appearance and his clothes became dazzling white*" (Lk 9:29). Matthew wrote, "*He was transfigured before their eyes, his face became as dazzling as the sun, his clothes as radiant as light*" (Mt 17:2). This event called to mind a scene from Exodus in which the face of Moses was glorified while he talked with God. The New Testament account implied more than a reflection of

divine glory on Jesus' face. The word "transfigured" in Greek is *metamorphoo*, which implied a change of form--an intrinsic change in the very body of Jesus. It appeared that the divine nature of Jesus totally permeated the humanity of Jesus, just as it would do after His resurrection and ascension into heaven.

All three Evangelists identified the two men who appeared and spoke with Jesus as Moses and Elijah. They represented the Law and the Prophets--the Old Testament. Their presence indicated that the Old Testament testified that Jesus was the Messiah.

Mark related, "*A cloud came, overshadowing them, and out of the cloud a voice, 'This is my Son, my beloved. Listen to him'*" (Mk 9:7). We know from the Old Testament that the "cloud" was the manifestation of the Divine Presence. The cloud was the *Shekinah*--a symbol of Divine Glory.

From the time the Book of Deuteronomy was written, it was known that God would one day send another prophet like Moses. It was recorded: "*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren, and I will put my words into his mouth, and he shall tell them all that I command him*" (Deut 18:18). The Voice from the cloud recalled this prophecy and confirmed that it was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. The disappearance of Moses and Elijah symbolized that the Beloved Son of God replaced the Law and the Prophets.

When Mark wrote that the disciples were covered by the cloud, he indicated that they too were brought into relationship with the Divine Presence through their relationship with Jesus. It was a foretaste of the Divine Glory they would share as faithful disciples.

The vision ended with the command, "*This is my Son, my beloved. Listen to him*". When the Voice fell silent and the cloud dispersed, they were alone with Jesus. From now on the voice of God would be heard only within the voice of Jesus. Only in the presence of Jesus would the Divine Presence be with them. The heavenly vision passed away but its message remained. The vision emphasized the message--"*Listen to him!*". It is a voice that is often difficult to hear and to obey--the Voice of Jesus and Him Crucified!

THE POSSESSED BOY

Mark related the narrative of a possessed boy to illustrate the implication of resurrection from the dead. The concept of resurrection and the victory of Jesus over the power of evil puzzled the disciples. Beneath the surface of the narration, one can begin to see the sacramental life of the Church. Mark desired to express that the power of the Risen Lord, with his victory over evil, was to be found in the Sacraments of the Church. And if the Church disappointed the hopes of the people, it was not from a deficiency of Jesus' power and love, but the failure of the Church's faith in Jesus.

If disciples failed to do good in His name, it was because they failed to rely upon His Presence and Power. In the case of the possessed boy, the disciples lacked the authority to dispel the demon because of their disbelief. Jesus sternly noted this lack, "*What an unbelieving lot you are! How long must I remain with you? How long can I endure you?*" (Mk 9:19). The one thing that would distinguish the disciples of Jesus from the "crowd" was *where* they placed their faith.

When the boy was brought to Jesus, the evil spirit demonstrated its power and control over the boy. It challenged the power of Jesus as it had the power of his disciples. Jesus questioned the father, "*How long has he been like this?*" (Mk 9:21). The father related that this destructive and evil force had been in operation since childhood. This time sequence symbolized the hold of the Evil One over human nature itself. Only Jesus possessed the power to deliver the human spirit from this evil

The father's lack of confidence illustrated that people set limits upon what God can do, or will do, through Jesus Christ. Here, Mark was not dealing with the unbelief of the Pharisees, but the deficiency of a faith filled with doubts and fears, a faith that was in need of divine power to bring it to life. Mark illustrated well that the fullness of faith is a gift from God. The confidence of faith depends on reliance upon God's power. "*Unless your faith is firm you shall not be firm*" (Is 7:9b). Faith in God sets no limit on the power of God. St. James wrote, "*Yet we must ask in faith, never doubting, for the doubter is like surf tossed and driven by the wind. A man of this sort, devious and erratic in all he does, must not expect to receive anything from God*" (Js 1:6-8).

The disciples asked Jesus privately, *“Why is it that we could not expel it?”* (Mk 9:28). If the disciples were seeking some special method to overcome their failure, they missed the point of the lesson. They needed to learn that all power is found in God, not in the believer. In dealing with the power of Satan, there is no room for human achievement. Effective discipleship results not from human piety, but from divine action within and through the disciple. The successful disciples will learn first to pray, and through prayer discover their inadequacy and their entire dependency upon God.

AS LITTLE CHILDREN

Mark demonstrated clearly how foreign the spirit of the disciples was from the spirit of the Lord. They failed to understand His way, and were complacent in their own ways. They lacked self-denial and were self-seeking; their spirit led to self-exaltation. They secretly argued among themselves as to who was the greatest among them. Jesus knew what was going on and requested that they share their little “secret” with Him. They refused.

In our own judgment so many things in our life appear important and impressive. When we subject these “lights” of ours to the Presence of God, and view them in the light of His life and eternity, so many of our thoughts, desires, ambitions and works appear to be small, mean, and dirty. St. John teaches us, *“Everyone who practices evil hates the light, and does not come near it for fear his deed will be exposed. But he who does what is true comes into the light, to make clear his deeds are done in God”* (Jn 3:20-21).

If we always seek to subject what we think, plan and do to the Presence of God, how much more blessed our lives would be.

To counteract the pride of the disciples, Jesus placed a little child before them as a symbol of Christian humility. He sought to correct their attitude and at the same time illustrate a basic principle of His own life. The eyes of the child are not turned in upon self, but are directed outwardly with an openness and acceptance of life itself. A little child is free of self-glorification, and so was Jesus of Nazareth, and so must be His disciples. Jesus identified Himself with the little child, and before His Father, He was this little child. Jesus identified Himself with the “little ones” of this earth, and He equated all service to them as service to Himself. Jesus

sought to draw the eyes of his disciples from their self-glorification by teaching them that humble service to others is the essence of Christian Discipleship and the measure of greatness in the eyes of heaven. The night before His death, Jesus dramatically illustrated this by washing their feet. He told them, *“You address me as ‘Teacher and Lord’ and you are right, for I am... What I just did was give you an example, that you should do as I have done to you...If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them”* (Jn 13:13,15,17)

When Jesus told His disciples, *“Anyone who is not against us is with us”* (Mk 9:40), He formulated the principle of ecumenism. There is a shared responsibility to keep the Spirit and Power of Jesus alive in this world. Anyone who is engaged in the struggle against the forces of evil cannot be regarded as an enemy of Jesus or an enemy of the Gospel.

Chapter Nine closed with a stern warning from Jesus about a disciple's responsibility for the spiritual welfare of other people. The care and concern for others was at the very heart of discipleship, and being a stumbling block and scandal to others was the very denial of all that Christian discipleship stood for. Jesus clearly taught His disciples to abandon whatever in their life proved to be an obstacle to the entrance of the kingdom of God, either to oneself or to another. A person can cut oneself off from both life and the kingdom of God through a careless disregard for the well-being of others. Jesus used contemporary images and expressions to describe the afterlife that awaits the man who alienates himself from God and humanity.

Jesus used the concept of salt to describe the true spirit of His disciples. He noted that if salt lost its saltiness, it was useless. Perhaps He was comparing “salt” to the presence of the Holy Spirit within the souls of His disciples. Jesus told His disciples, *“Keep salt in your hearts and you will be at peace with one another”* (Mk 9:50b). If the Spirit of Jesus abides in the heart of the disciples, they will be at peace with one another. The disciples must not allow pettiness and quarrels to destroy the Christian Community created through loving service to one another. He taught them, *“Learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find peace for your souls”* (Mt 11:29). Love springs forth from a gentle and loving heart.

THE SON OF MAN

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

SON OF MAN, AS FAR AS THEY ARE CONCERNED YOU ARE LIKE A BEAUTIFUL LOVE SONG SUNG TO MUSIC. THEY LISTEN TO YOUR WORDS BUT NO ONE PUTS THEM INTO PRACTICE. (Ezekiel 33:32)

FIRST DAY: Read Ezekiel 2:1-9, 3:1-20 and 33:30-32.

1. What does the title "Son of Man" mean?
2. Why do you think Jesus applied this title to Himself?
3. In what way does the Son of Man in Ezekiel parallel the life of Jesus?
4. What is revealed to you when the Scriptures say Jesus is the Word made flesh?

SECOND DAY: Read Romans 5:12-19, 1Cor 15:44-49; Philippians 2:5-11.

1. Why do you think Paul saw Jesus as the New Adam?
2. How do you understand Romans 5:19?
3. How do you understand 1Cor 15:45?
4. What does Paul see as the outstanding virtue of the Son of Man?

THIRD DAY: Read 1Kings 8:10-21; 2 Macabees 2:1-8; Luke 9:28-36.

1. In what way do you see Jesus fulfilling the prophecy 1Kgs 8:19?
2. What is revealed in the Transfiguration concerning Jesus' nature?
3. What is symbolized by the cloud covering also the disciples?
4. What lesson does Mark 9:8 teach the Church?

FOURTH DAY: Read Mark 9:14-29.

1. What is symbolized by the boy being possessed since childhood?
2. Why are the disciples unable to drive out this evil spirit?
3. What did Jesus mean when he replied to the father, "If you can?"
4. What does Jesus teach when He tells His disciples, "This kind you can drive out only by prayer."

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 9:30-37; Matthew 18:1-4.

1. Why do you think the disciples were afraid to question Jesus?
2. How does the spirit of Jesus differ from that of His disciples?
3. What does Matthew 18:3-4 mean to you?
4. Why do we fail to examine our lives in the light of Jesus' life?

SIXTH DAY: Read Mark 9:38-50; Matthew 18:5-14.

1. What lesson do you see Jesus trying to teach the disciples at this time?
2. Who do you see as the "little ones" spoken of by Jesus?
3. What does it mean to be a cause of scandal to another?
4. What truth does Jesus seek to teach in Mark 9:43-48?

CHAPTER 11

STANDARD OF DISCIPLESHIP

INTRODUCTION

The life of Jesus set the pattern of discipleship; the teaching of Jesus illumined His Way. The way of Jesus always opposes the way of fallen human nature. His teachings create tension within the human heart. His Way is the Way of God that lies beyond the grasp of the sinful human heart. It establishes values and criteria that not only leave the human mind in darkness, but confound its ideas and findings. It is the Way of the Holy Spirit to always leave the “flesh” in darkness and pain.

The Way of Jesus imposes serious moral responsibilities upon the disciple because the disciple has been incorporated into the very life of Jesus. As Paul teaches, “*You then are the body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it*” (1Cor 12:27). A Christian becomes a “new creation” through grace, with the potential to live a new life--one in union with the Holy Spirit--enabling the Christian to be unique in society and in his or her relationship with others. Because of this Jesus refers to His disciples as being “*the light of the world, the salt of the earth*” (Mt 5:13,14).

It follows as day does the night, that as the Christian person grows in grace, his or her sinfulness becomes more apparent to them as the light of Jesus' teachings shine upon their life. As the absolute Will of God becomes clearer to the eye, the spirit experiences more deeply its alienation from the will of God. It is not the intention of such light to produce despair or hopelessness; these are not the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but of human pride. Where there is knowledge of Jesus and faith in Him, the Holy Spirit seeks to lead the spirit deeper into hope as well as the virtue of humility.

The Body of Christ, the Church, is composed not only of saints--those who fulfill the Will of God in their lives, but sinners who still resist it in one way or another. St. Paul clearly expressed this sinful condition in Romans, *"I cannot understand my own actions. I do not do what I want to do, but what I hate...My inner self agrees with the Law of God, but I see in my body's members another law at war with the law in my mind; this makes me a prisoner of the law of sin which dwells in my members"* (Rom 7:15,22-23). Such people are in need of divine light and grace. They must patiently persevere in prayer, for what is needed is deliverance through God's grace.

There must always remain room in the Christian Community and within the Christian Heart for the spiritually immature, and for the spiritually ill and crippled--those only touched by the grace of redemption. As long as we live on this earth, God is not finished with any one of us--saint or sinner!

THE QUESTION OF DIVORCE

In the time of Jesus, marriage was highly exalted among the Jews as an ideal. In actual practice, divorce was so wide-spread that women hesitated to marry because of the insecurity involved. The Torah permitted divorce, but according to the law and custom a woman could not divorce her husband. The man alone could divorce his wife, and she could only remarry with his consent. This was the reason for the "bill of divorce", a proof that the husband's consent had been given. A woman could be divorced with or without her consent, but the woman could only request a divorce. She could claim a divorce, but if her husband refused, the claim could not be enforced. Divorce among the Jews was always a man's prerogative.

Adultery was punishable by death according to the Mosaic Law. The definition of adultery was intercourse between a married woman and a man other than her husband. A woman could commit adultery against her husband, but a man could not commit adultery against his wife. He could only commit adultery against another man by having relationships with the other man's wife.

Divorce was wide-spread and accepted at the time of Jesus. The only point open for discussion was the interpretation of the scriptural phrase “*finds in her something indecent*” (Deut 24:1). The phrase was hotly debated at the time. We are told the question was presented to Jesus as a test. “*Then some Pharisees came up and as a test asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’*”(Mk 10:2).

In Mark's Gospel account, Jesus absolutely prohibited divorce and remarriage. He taught that divorce was sinful and if you remarried after the divorce, the sin of adultery is added to the sin of divorce. In Matthew's gospel account, Jesus forbids remarriage after divorce but permits divorce in case of adultery.

Clearly, Jesus regarded marriage as an indissoluble union, and placed husband and wife in a relationship of equality. This teaching went beyond both Jewish and pagan conceptions of marriage. He gave marriage a position of the highest dignity. Jesus maintained that before God there had never been any other way. In the beginning, there was one woman for one man, a truth that had been established in creation itself.

The term “one flesh”, as quoted in Genesis, meant virtually a blood relationship. The term implied that marriage constituted a relationship as real and as indissoluble as the one that binds a person to blood relatives. It implied that a man's relationship with his wife took precedence even over his obligations to his parents.

Jesus taught that the exception of adultery in Deuteronomy departed from the original intent of God, which was the ideal of marriage. But God made an accommodation to human weakness, granted because of the “hardness of heart” and the stubborn refusal to obey the divine law of Genesis. The exception clause to the ban on divorce was historical witness to the continued sinfulness of humanity. Jesus referred twice to the “commandment” while his opponents referred twice to the “permission”, i.e. what is “allowed.” Christians must seek the spirit rather than the letter of the Law, which involves more than what is forbidden.

Many scholars believed that the exception clause in Matthew (lewd conduct is a separate case) represented the standing point of some Jewish Christians, who could not bring themselves to believe that Jesus had been

stricter than even the strictest rabbinical school, or that He had taken a position that invalidated a law in Deuteronomy.

Other scholars maintained that while the exception clause was an addition by Matthew, it nevertheless properly interpreted Jesus' meaning. It supposed that the question of adultery was excluded from consideration on the grounds of Deuteronomy 22:22, "*If a man is discovered having a relationship with a woman married to another, both the man and woman ... shall die...*"

When these scriptural passages are used to interpret the doctrine of the Sacrament of Marriage, scholars point out that there is no direct evidence as to the original form of the statement. It cannot be assumed that the question is settled by simply quoting Jesus' words, for the record is limited to His reply to a hostile question, and to a detached statement of the Lord. The trend of Jesus' teachings was away from legalism. By proclaiming such a commandment, which set forth the pure will of God in its absolute form, Jesus was calling for a new existence for men and women before God. A disciple of Jesus is called to this new existence.

It is left to the Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to authentically interpret this teaching of Jesus. As we view how the Church deals with the problem of marriage and divorce, we should bear in mind that the statement "*What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder*" (Mk 10:9), the term "*man*" is understood as opposed to God. When Moses dispensed the Jews from the Divine Law, he did so not as mere man but as God's representative, possessing divine authority.

The Church continues to maintain that a true Christian Marriage is in God, and cannot be dissolved. Such a marriage is one that exists between two baptized Christians who fulfill the necessary requirements for the reception of the Sacrament of Marriage.

Each sacrament involves an interaction between the Lord and the believers within the community. Church Law governing the sacraments attempts to ensure the authenticity and integrity of the marriage. Marriage as a sacrament is a unique interpersonal relationship--a covenant relationship between consenting parties who accept certain rights and responsibilities. Hence, marriage law seeks to safeguard the

integrity of the relationship, not only for the benefit of the parties themselves, but also for the well-being of society as a whole.

The Church does declare that certain marriages can be annulled. An annulment means that, contrary to appearance, the marriage does not fulfill the legal requirements for community recognition of a sacramental marriage; therefore the marriage contract is invalid. The Church also has the authority to dissolve the bond of marriage where the marriage is valid, but non-sacramental, i.e. one or both parties were not baptized, resulting in a marriage where a certain quality is absent. The so called Pauline Privilege is a case where the actual bond of marriage between a non-baptized and a baptized person is dissolved by the Church. *“If the unbeliever wishes to separate, however, let him do so. The believing husband or wife is not bound in such cases. God has called us to live in peace” (1Cor 7:15).*

BRINGING INFANTS TO JESUS

In line with a natural development, Mark introduced Jesus' attitude toward little children. Mark narrated one of the most beloved memories from the life of Jesus. It was customary for pious Jewish mothers to bring their children to a holy rabbi for a blessing--particularly on the child's first birthday. On certain occasions, some mothers tried to present their little children to Jesus for His blessing, but they were impeded by the disciples. This attitude of the disciples demonstrated their protectiveness of Jesus; they sought to preserve Him from unnecessary and meaningless encounters. Jesus reacted to this very strongly, which suggested that a real evil had occurred. It is the only time “indignation” is ascribed to Jesus. The disciples understood by His rebuke that it was wrong to impede little children from coming to Him because *“it is just to such as these belong the kingdom of God” (Mk 10:14).*

Jesus implied that certain qualities of childhood were essential for reception and entrance into the kingdom of God. Apparently those qualities are often absent in the adult person. One spiritual writer maintained that adults often become over-mature, too hard and calculating, mistrustful, overly analytical. Self gets in their spiritual way, making them unfit receptors of the kingdom, whereas a child possesses a natural openness and receptiveness to life and to its truths. There is a natural humility within the child, and the child is content to be

dependent upon the care and generosity of others. It is in such a childlike fashion that the kingdom of God must be received. The kingdom of God is a gift that must simply be accepted; it can never be personally achieved or deserved. As the little children came to be blessed by Jesus and to receive whatever He could give to them, so must men and women come to Him.

St. Therese of Lisieux expressed her doctrine of Spiritual Childhood in these words, "I see that it is sufficient to recognize one's nothingness and to abandon oneself as a child into God's arms ... Jesus does not demand great actions from us but only simply surrender and gratitude." Pope Benedict XV taught, "In spiritual childhood is the secret of sanctity for all the faithful of the Catholic world."

Many see in this scriptural episode a defense of the practice of infant baptism. The early Church saw in the words, "*Let the children come to me, do not hinder them!*", an expression of the Lord's will in this regard. The action of Jesus corresponded fairly closely to that of the minister at the baptism of an infant. In the primitive baptismal rite, the question "What hinders...?" was asked liturgically before the candidate was baptized. The blessing and laying on of hands were also an essential part. Infant baptism is an appropriate symbol of the true spiritual conditions needed for reception and entrance into the kingdom of God.

THE STUMBLING BLOCK OF RICHES

The way of Christian discipleship is always rooted in Jesus and in His life lived on earth. St. Paul writes of Jesus, "*Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich*" (2Cor 8:9). Jesus requires of his disciples the spirit of *anawim*, which is the name that Scripture gives to God's needy and poor--the little ones of this earth. *Anawim* is the spirit of true spiritual poverty, which humbly looks to God as the source of all goodness, material or spiritual. External poverty is never the cause of this spirit, but only the occasion for expressing the spirit of *anawim*. Material prosperity itself is not essentially opposed to the spirit of *anawim*, but often impedes and corrupts it.

Mark saw the love of riches to be a fundamental obstacle to discipleship. The vice of greed impeded men from being true disciples of Jesus, as Mark demonstrated in the following episode. Jesus was setting out on His journey when a rich man ran up and knelt before Him. The seriousness of the meeting may be measured by the gravity of the question asked by the man, *“What must I do to come to eternal life?”* The young man confessed that all his life he avoided evil. Jesus loved him, however He knew that merely avoiding evil was not enough. Jesus issued His radical invitation to him, *“You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven; and come, follow me” (Mk 10:17, 21).*

The young man lacked one thing--he lacked Jesus. He lacked being a disciple of Jesus. In his case, his wealth was an obstacle. He generously avoided evil but he was not prepared to make the sacrifice the love of God asked. Mark tells us that when the young man heard the words of Jesus, his face fell and he departed in sorrow, which perhaps would be a sorrow he would carry forever. He would never taste the joy flowing from the spirit of anawim as did Francis of Assisi.

Jesus watched the young man as he turned his back and walked away. Jesus turned around and looked directly at his disciples and said, *“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle”* The disciples were completely shocked by his words and they turned to each other in their anxiety and asked one another, *“Then who can be saved?”* Jesus fixed his gaze on them and said, *“For man it is impossible, but not for God. With God all things are possible”* (Mk 10:23-27).

At this moment the disciples came face to face with the truth of discipleship: its demands are so radical that discipleship can never be attributed to man's achievement, but only to God's grace. Jesus would later tell them, *“It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you” (Jn 15:16).*

What appears in the eyes of men to be a foolish way truly becomes a wise way. It is the life that finds itself after being willing to lose itself. It is the life that gives up all and receives a hundred-fold in return.

Jesus makes a remarkable promise to those willing to follow Him: they will receive a hundred-fold in this life, and everlasting life in the world to come. His promise encompasses every aspect of life. Discipleship leads to the fullness and wholeness of life. Where there is genuine, joyous abandonment, life is experienced in its fullness here and now; it is not a life that lives on empty promises in the hereafter, but a life alive in its hundred-fold reward of love, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit of God. It was St. Teresa of Avila who said, "A sad saint is, indeed, a sad saint!"

Nevertheless, a life lived in the way of the Lord is a life that must bloom amidst the thorns of the fallen and sinful world, and so Jesus adds, "*with persecutions besides...*" (Mk 10:30).

STANDARD FOR DISCIPLESHIP

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK

(PLEASE MEMORIZE)

*LET THE CHILDREN COME TO ME AND DO NOT HINDER THEM. IT IS TO JUST SUCH AS THESE THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD BELONGS.
(Mark 10:14)*

FIRST DAY: Read Deuteronomy 22:13-28 and 24:1-5.

1. What was the Old Testament teaching about divorce?
2. Who had the right to divorce in the Old Testament?
3. What did adultery mean in the Old Testament?
4. What was the legal penalty for adultery?

SECOND DAY: Read Mark 10:1-12 and Genesis 2:18-25.

1. How was the divorce clause in Deuteronomy interpreted by the Jews?
2. How do you feel about a woman's condition under the Mosaic Law?
3. How does Jesus explain the right to divorce in the Old Testament?
4. What does this explanation tell you about divorce?

THIRD DAY: Read Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-12.

1. What is Jesus' teaching about divorce and remarriage?
2. How does Jesus' answer run contrary to Jewish Law and customs?
3. How do the words of Jesus differ in Mark from those in Matthew?
4. How do you feel about Jesus' attitude toward divorce and remarriage?

FOURTH DAY: 1 Corinthians 7:8-16, 39-40.

- 1. How are the words “let no man put asunder” to be interpreted?**
- 2. When does Paul actually permit divorce and remarriage?**
- 3. What does the example of Paul's dispensation teach us?**
- 4. What is the difference between an “annulment” and “dissolution of the marriage bond”?**

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 10:13-16 and Luke 18:15-17.

- 1. What should be the Christian attitude towards divorce and remarriage?**
- 2. When can they in good conscience receive Penance and Holy Eucharist?**
- 3. What do you think is meant by Mark 10:15?**
- 4. What qualities of discipleship are symbolized by infant baptism?**

SIXTH DAY: Read Mark 10:17-31.

- 1. What is the Spirit of anawim?**
- 2. How can riches impede and corrupt this spirit?**
- 3. What does the encounter with the rich man teach about eternal life?**
- 4. In what way is the Lord's promise in verse 29-30 fulfilled or not fulfilled in your life?**

CHAPTER 12

THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

Jesus informed the disciples for the third time that He would soon be put to death by saying,

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise. (Mk 10:33-34)

Mark demonstrated the disciples' continued failure to understand His mission. Immediately after Jesus' prophecy James and John approached Him, seeking a promise from Him that they would be given the seats on each side of Jesus in the kingdom of God. Jesus was quite patient with these two brothers and used the opportunity to teach an important lesson. He asked them, "*Can you drink of the same cup I shall drink or be baptized in the same bath of pain as I?*" (Mk 10:38).

There are a number of Old Testament passages which suggest that "cup" and "baptism" symbolized suffering that was willingly embraced. "Cup" became symbolic for the life and experience that God allotted to people. "Baptism" symbolized being overwhelmed with disaster. The Greek word *baptizien* meant to dip. The past participle of the verb implied "being submerged"; it was commonly used to mean being submerged in an experience or an emotion such as fear or sorrow.

Jesus' words to James and John clearly indicated that sharing in the glory of the kingdom was related to sharing in the sufferings of Jesus. It may be deduced from what Jesus responded that the service a person rendered to God determined the place in the kingdom to be received, and those places

had been ordained by the Father Himself. The highest places in the kingdom will be given to those persons whose lives rendered the greatest service to God and mankind.

Mark implied that those who have accepted Christian Baptism, *have been baptized in Christ*, and who now drink from the Eucharistic Cup must be prepared to share in the suffering of Jesus. They may even be called to bear martyrdom for His name's sake. This discourse carries an important message to would-be disciples: the victory of Jesus over sin and death does not free disciples from the evil consequences of sin in this world, which are suffering and death. A disciple ought to ask himself or herself, "If a soldier desires to share in the victory of his king, should I not be willing to share in His sufferings?"

CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY

The overt ambition of James and John angered the other ten Apostles. Jesus took this opportunity to teach the disciples what their attitude must be toward authority, power, and greatness in this world.

If a member of the Christian Community shares in the authority of Jesus Christ, he has the obligation to express such authority as Jesus Himself did. Jesus Christ is truly the model and guide for expressing all authority in the Church and in the life of a Christian.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). It was the mission of Jesus to establish a kingdom on earth that glorified the Father's love for human beings. Jesus revealed the kingdom of heaven to be one of love. The authority and the lordship of Jesus could not be separated from the love of the heavenly Father. The teachings, the deeds, and the commandments of Jesus were extensions of God's love.

In every legitimate exercise of Christian authority on this earth, the love of God must be present; it ought to be visible and it needs to be experienced. It is the duty of those who exercise authority in the name of Jesus Christ to make visible the love of Christ in their teachings, their rules, and their commands in order that Christian Obedience is always a response to Divine Love!

We ought to realize that no code of Christian conduct, however extensive, can ever be an exhaustive expression of the good that God's presence and grace may ask of a person. A Christian must be trained to hear the voice of God in his or her soul which may demand an obedient response that is unique and special to the individual.

Christian obedience is a conscious and willing response to God's love as it is revealed in His laws, in His Church, and also through His Holy Spirit in a grace-filled spirit. Jesus, through His Spirit, enlightens His disciples from within. Through His scriptures and the teaching voice of the Church, He instructs His disciples from without.

In order to live an obedient Christian life, it is not enough to be aware of love's demands and the desire to achieve good. A Christian must also possess moral liberty. Moral liberty is the inner power of will put to the service of acknowledged good. In other words, the Christian possesses the power to accomplish the deeds love demands, and to make the sacrifices the deeds may entail, while holding oneself free from the slavery of sin and Satan. Paul speaks of this liberty when he writes the Romans, "*I beg you through the mercy of God to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship*" (Rom 12:1). Such liberty is a gift from God that can only be received, preserved, and perfected by an unconditional docility to the Will of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is obvious from the life and teachings of Jesus that true authority--and obedience to that authority--expresses itself concretely in loving service of God and mankind. Divine authority and obedience truly blend themselves in self-sacrifice.

THE GRACE TO SEE

As a preparation for what would occur in Jerusalem, Mark presented a miracle in which a blind man received his sight. As Jesus passed through Jericho with a sizable crowd, its commotion caught the attention of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar sitting by the roadside. When he was informed that it was Jesus of Nazareth passing by, he called out loudly, "*Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!*" (Mk 10:47). By attributing a

messianic title to Jesus, Bartimaeus expressed the belief that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. His plea *“have pity on me”*, appeared to imply even more. It was a plea one would direct to a divine being.

In the past, Jesus had silenced any attempt to publicize Him as the Messiah. This time, he neither silenced nor corrected Bartimaeus, but called him to Himself. Bartimaeus responded immediately and spontaneously. It was a moment of grace not to be lost; Jesus was passing by for the last time. Although Bartimaeus could not see Jesus, he jumped up and headed in His direction. Wanting nothing to impede his way, he threw aside his cloak. By whatever grace he possessed, he came to Jesus even though he was blind and could not follow Him.

Jesus asked Bartimaeus, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* Bartimaeus responded by calling Jesus *“my dear Teacher”*. He had arrived at faith in Jesus, but he could not see the way of Jesus. He said, *“I want to see.”* Jesus said in reply, *‘Be on your way! Your faith has healed you.’* Immediately he received his sight and started up the road” (Mk 10:51-52). *“Up the road”* that lead to Calvary. When Bartimaeus received his sight, he saw that Jesus' Way was his way. No one can “see” the Way of the Messiah, and follow that Way, unless the miracle of faith has opened his or her eyes. All who desire to follow Jesus must pray the prayer of Bartimaeus: *“Rabboni [My dear Teacher], I want to see!”*

The Apostles and other disciples arrived at a point of truly being able to understand the Person and life of Jesus only in the light of His Resurrection from the dead. As the life of Jesus unfolded before their eyes, its true significance was lost upon them. They viewed His life through their own expectations and illusions. As those two “failed” disciples on the road to Emmaus put it, *“We were hoping he was the one who would set Israel free”* (Lk 24:21). Our Lord's effort to bring some reality into the Jews' expectations of the Messiah had failed. Only when they actually encountered the horrors of Good Friday were they shocked into some kind of awareness of the truth of His mission.

THE INVISIBLE THREAD

Many human beings are like General Naaman in the Old Testament (see 2Kgs 5:13), believing that one does God's will only by accomplishing extraordinary deeds. Some see evidence of the divine only in the "mind-blowing" signs and wonders. The human eye often fails to see the face of God in the common occurrences of everyday existence. It fails to note the hand of divine Providence in the accidental and chance happenings of daily living. By always looking for God in the extraordinary and unusual, a person fails to recognize His ever-presence in the mundane stuff of daily existence. A person fails to love God in a myriad of daily opportunities; one remains unresponsive to a God clothed in the humdrum.

How many Christians wait for the big moment to heroically accomplish the Will of God, and to express their total love of Him, only to discover too late that all the moments to do so have passed quietly beneath their nose. Everyday life is divine *milieu*. St. Therese of Lisieux spoke of finding "straws" of divine will scattered throughout the day--straws that continually fed the fire of divine love in her heart.

In the myriad events crowded into Jesus' days, particularly those last six days before His death, Jesus beheld the Will of God, and humbly responded to that Will. In the midst of all the evil, turmoil, and pandemonium, the Will of God ran like a constant thread. The Divine Will actually spelled itself out in terrible sufferings, accompanied by a horrible death. The heavenly Father permitted all this as the means through which His Beloved Son would save the world. It was for this reason the Son of Man was called "Jesus": "*You are to name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins*" (Mt 1:21).

THE ARRIVAL IN JERUSALEM

Jesus arrived with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, facing the city of Jerusalem. It was Sunday, the first day of the week, and the count down had begun: Jesus had six more days to live. It was the hour to proclaim Himself as the Messiah of Israel, but not the Messiah of Jewish expectations. Jesus performed a symbolic act that manifested His true messianic role: He entered Jerusalem riding upon a colt.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus was presented on Palm Sunday as the messianic king who came to claim His capitol and temple. Of all the evangelists, Mark presented a curtailed account, un-dramatic and simple. Mark avoided any mention of a triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. He presented Jesus more as the unrecognized Savior of His people rather than as its messianic king. The cry "Hosanna", the acclamation of praise recorded by Mark, means "Save us!"

The Synoptic Gospels related that the Palm Sunday procession ended in the Temple. Mark simply stated, "*He entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve*" (Mk 11:11). Mark pictured Jesus in the temple as the Inspector General—"he looked around at everything." Jesus appeared in the temple as its Lord, whose coming the Prophet Malachi had foretold.

REJECTION BY ISRAEL

According to Mark, there was no acknowledgement of Jesus' claim to be Israel's Savior and Lord. Jesus met only disbelief--a disbelief that rejected Jesus' authority. The external rejection of Jesus' authority by the Jewish leaders revealed their internal rebellion against God's authority. Their rejection of God, undoubtedly unconscious, was nevertheless a reality. Their external observance of religion no doubt hid their internal spiritual poverty from them. But it was more than spiritual poverty; it was an alienation of their spirit from God--the apostasy of the heart. In the next few days the Jewish leaders subtly revealed their alienation through their hatred toward Jesus. Jesus recognized all this as a projected hatred and rejection of His Father. Jesus was truly their last chance for the salvation of the Nation of Israel. Because of their rejection of Jesus, the words of the Prophets Micah, Jeremiah, and Malachi would be fulfilled.

Mark recorded two prophetic actions by Jesus that declared the words of the Prophets would be fulfilled: the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple. Mark reinforced the symbolic meaning of the cleansing of the temple by placing the event between the cursing of the fig tree (Mk 11:12-14) and the drying up of the tree (Mk 11:20-21). The fig tree symbolized the unbelief and rejection of Israel. Israel was foliage

without fruit--appearance without substance. The time of clemency had passed and the now the hour of judgment had come. Luke described the deep sorrow in the heart of Jesus over Israel's coming tragedy, "*Coming within the sight of the city, he wept over it and said, 'If only you had known the path to peace this day; but you have completely lost it from view'*" (Lk 19:41-42).

The cleansing of the temple was not a symbolic act of reform, but a sign indicating the end of temple worship and the temple. Even the appearance of worship would be destroyed. As the prophet foretold, the temple would be replaced by a new temple, and worship would be opened to all peoples and nations which would be realized through a new spiritual temple--the Body of Christ. Through faith in Jesus Christ, the distinction between Jew and Gentile would be destroyed, and access to God would be open to all people.

The construction of the New Temple would be achieved through the death of Jesus. Mark confirmed this prophecy when he recorded that after the chief priests and scribes heard of the cleansing of the temple, they sought the death of Jesus.

The chief priests, the Pharisees, and their scribes who acted in God's name, refused to accept God's authority over their lives. As St. John later observed, "*Everyone who practices evil hates the light, and does not come to the light for fear his deeds will be exposed*" (Jn 3:20). They actually battled against God's authority when it was detrimental to their own selfish ambition and fulfillment. In the parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mk 12:1-9), Jesus revealed to them the extent to which they would go.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

WHEN YOU STAND TO PRAY, FORGIVE ANYONE AGAINST WHOM YOU HAVE A GRIEVANCE SO THAT YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER MAY IN TURN FORGIVE YOU YOUR FAULTS (MARK 11:25)

FIRST DAY: Read Mark 10:32-45.

1. What do these verses reveal to you about the Twelve Apostles?
2. What is the price to be paid in order to share in the Glory of Jesus?
3. How should Christian authority differ from secular authority?
4. How do you think one can grow in Christian Obedience?

SECOND DAY: Read Mark 10:46-52; 1Cor 4:6-17.

1. According to Paul, what does it mean to follow in the way of Jesus?
2. What does Bartimaeus healing teach you about following Jesus?
3. What quality in Bartimaeus prepares him to receive this miracle?
4. What must one do who desires to follow Jesus but is unable?

THIRD DAY: Read Mark 11:1-11; Zechariah 9:9-11; Psalm 118:19-29.

1. What does Jesus symbolize by riding into Jerusalem on a colt?
2. How does Mark present Jesus to Jerusalem?
3. What is Jerusalem's reaction to Jesus' entrance into the city?
4. What is being signified in Mark 11:11.

FOURTH DAY: Read Micah 4:1-7; Jeremiah 7:1-7 and 26:1-24.

1. How do the prophets describe the quality of worship in the temple?
2. What do you think caused the deterioration of temple worship?
3. Do you think the same fate could befall Christian Worship?
4. How do you think you can guard the true spirit of worship?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 11:12-21; Malachi 1:10-11; Micah 4:1-6.

1. What does Jesus teach by the cursing of the fig tree?
2. What do you think the cleansing of the temple symbolized?
3. What is implied by "*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people?*"
4. What does Mark imply in 11:18.

SIXTH DAY: Read Mark 11:22-33.

1. What would you say God's "House of Prayer" is today?
2. What ought to be the quality of prayer in His House?
3. What does Mark 11:25 teach you?
4. What does the authority of Jesus Christ mean to you?

CHAPTER 13

RAYS OF THE SETTING SUN

INTRODUCTION

The most influential person in Jerusalem was the Jewish high priest. The most powerful Jewish institution was the Great Sanhedrin, the supreme religious body. The Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one members presided over by its president, the high priest. The membership was composed of three groups: the chief priests, composed of men previously holding the office of high priest and the leading members of families from which the high priests were chosen; the "elders", prominent members of the lay aristocracy who by reason of their wealth and position could make an effective contribution to the administration of civil affairs; and "scribes" or doctors of the law, who were mostly laymen that belonged to the party of the Pharisees. The Scribes were the most popular and dynamic members of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin, in its essence, represented the cream of Jewish society. It did not represent the masses, for whom Jesus had the greatest appeal--the people of the land.

Mark recorded that while Jesus was walking in the temple precincts, *"the chief priests, the scribes and the elders approached him and they said to him 'By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you the authority to do them?'"* (Mk 11:27-28). They were a delegation of the Sanhedrin. When these men refused to recognize that John the Baptist came from God, they rejected the authority of God. They had ceased to be a channel of divine authority in the eyes of Jesus. They had forfeited the right to religious obedience. Jesus implied this when he refused to obey them. He said to them, *"Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?"* When they answered, *"We do not know,"* Jesus said to them, *"Then neither will I tell you on what authority I do the things I do"* (Mk 11:29-30,33).

The scriptures had foretold that the authority of Moses endured until the coming of the Messiah. With Jesus revealing Himself as the Messiah, their authority ceased. But the Jews refused to accept their Messiah. What had actually occurred Jesus related in a parable addressed to the delegation of the Sanhedrin.

In Mark's account, the Parable of the Wicked Tenants appeared more in the form of an allegory than a parable. In this episode, Jesus stated His own unique position in the history of salvation. Jesus was not as those prophets who came before him; Jesus of Nazareth is the Beloved Son of the heavenly Father. To Jesus belongs authority and obedience. But, those in authority refused obedience to Him, and would kill Him in order to safeguard their own position. Because of their crime, God would destroy all they sought to gain and maintain through their evil deeds. What they would lose would go to others. *"The stone rejected by the builders has become the keystone of the structure. It was the Lord who did it and we find it marvelous to behold"* (Mk 12:10-11). In future years, the Church would find that these words explained the rise of the Church and the decline of Israel.

CAESAR VERSES GOD

Next, the Sanhedrin sent a delegation of Pharisees and Herodians after Jesus to catch Him in His speech. *"For the lips...drip honey, and (their) speech is smoother than oil; but in the end (they are) as bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword"* (Prov 5:3-4). The two groups came to Him and said, *"Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man, unconcerned about anyone's opinion; for you do not regard the position of men, but truly teach the way of God."* They then questioned Jesus, hoping to trap him, *"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?"*

Jesus knew the pretense and evil design behind this question. He said to them, *"Why put me to the test? Bring me a coin and let me look at it."* When they presented Him with the coin, He said to them, *"Whose likeness and inscription is this?"* According to ancient thinking, coins were ultimately the private property of the ruler who issued them and whose image they bore. The emperor was Tiberius. When they presented the coin to Jesus, He had what was needed. Their very possession of the coin proved not only their subjection to Rome, but their obligation to it. The Jewish leaders had welcomed this jurisdiction of Rome over them because they

enjoyed the protection it offered, but they had an obligation to pay for it. Jesus replied to them, "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*" (Mk 12:13-17).

The words translated "give" or "render" implied payment of a debt. In other words Jesus told them that since the money you have in your possession *is* Caesar's, you implicitly acknowledge his authority and therefore, you have an obligation to pay the tax to him. But, you also have a debt to God: man bears the image of God and everything is insignificant in the light of man's relationship with God.

People receive certain benefits and goods from their government, and have an obligation to return something in the form of good citizenship. But, what does society give to us in comparison to the blessings and benefits that come from God? What is the debt each of us owes to God? If God sent us a bill for services rendered, what would be the debt owed? God does demand a return! Paul's words to the Romans apply to many of us, "*They certainly had knowledge of God, yet they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks*" (Rm 1:21)

These recorded words of Jesus carried an important message to Mark's Roman Community: a person's rightful duty to Caesar does not supersede one's duty to God. One fulfills the duty of citizenship, but above all, one fulfills one's obligation to God whose coming is imminent.

BODILY RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

The enemies of Jesus lined up, taking their turn to discredit Him or trap Him in His speech. The next attack came from the Sadducees, the priestly class. The term "Sadducee" signified the *Zadokites* which was derived from the proper name Zadok, a priest who distinguished himself by his fidelity during the reign of David. The sons of Zadok were the aristocracy of the priesthood. The Prophet Ezekiel gave them the exclusive rights to the priestly functions.

The Sadducees accepted only the first five books of the Bible as Sacred Scripture. They rejected all the oral laws, traditions, rules and regulations esteemed by the Pharisees. They neither believed in the

resurrection from the dead nor in spirits and angels. They held that there was no evidence for these beliefs in the Pentateuch--the first five books of the Bible.

The Sadducees presented to Jesus their standard objection to the resurrection, which reduced the idea to the ridiculous. They related the case of one woman who, in accord with the Levitical Law of Moses, had married seven brothers during her lifetime. They asked Jesus, *"Whose wife would she be in the life to come?"* (Mk 12:23).

Jesus' answer dealt with the fact and the manner of the resurrection. He taught first that the future life was not to be measured or thought of in terms of the present life on earth. When Jesus taught that the body of the resurrected would be like that of the angels, he implied that the resurrected body would be "spiritualized." Human beings would not be angels, but they would be *like* angels. Jesus maintained that the fact of the resurrection was confirmed in the Pentateuch when God revealed to Moses, *"I am ... the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob"* (Ex 3:6). Jesus told them, *"He is the God of the living not the dead. You are very much mistaken"* (Mk 12:27).

Jesus told them why they failed to know the truth, *"You are badly misled, because you fail to understand the Scriptures or the power of God"* (Mk 12:24). What Jesus said to the Sadducees has a wide application to the disbelievers of today.

People fail to know the power of God. God is love! They fail to experience the love of God in their own lives--a love that is eternal and always life-giving. Paul speaks of this love when he reminds Christians that their experience of the Holy Spirit is *"the first fruits"* of their eternal life. *"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from dead dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus from the dead will bring your mortal bodies to life also, through his Spirit dwelling in you"* (Rm 8:11). Such unbelievers give evidence to their failure to experience God in their lives. The testimony of ungodly lives can only share their darkness with others, and show their ignorance of a loving God and His loving ways.

THE RIGHT QUESTION

As the contest between Jesus and his enemies reached its climax, Mark introduced an episode that demonstrated Jesus' essential faithfulness to the Jewish religion and His love for the spirit of the Law. A scribe asked Jesus a question that was the subject of lively debate among the rabbis, "*Which is the first of all the commandments?*"

Jesus' answer to this question stated clearly that love of God is the first commandment. It is the chief service all people owe God; it is what must be rendered to God. This love must proceed from the entire person, and be a total expression of the person. It supersedes all other affections—primarily that omnipresent love of self. Jesus knew self-love had a monopoly on the human heart. It needed to be subordinated to the love of God and generously opened to other human beings.

Jesus formulated His answer to the scribe by combining two widely separated texts in the Old Testament: "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might*" (Deut 6:4-5), which is called the *Shema*, and is part of the confession of faith recited daily by all true Israelites; and "*You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord*" (Lev 19:18). The ancient commandment in Deuteronomy took on new meaning when the second was placed alongside it. When Mark introduced it as a "second" commandment, he did so in order to emphasize the proper sequence of love.

It is not possible to keep the first commandment unless one lives according to the second commandment. Yet, love of neighbor depends upon our recognizing that this love becomes possible only through proper love of God. St. John observed, "*No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another God dwells in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us*" (1John 4:12).

The commandments of love truly destroyed the spirit of legalism. Jesus excluded legalistic interpretations of the law that required all sorts of observances while losing sight of the truth: true love of God never

consisted in a “holy” indifference to the needs of other human beings. Love of God that did not find expression in love of neighbor was an illusion.

One of the scribes agreed with Jesus, and he added, *“To love one’s neighbor as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings or sacrifices”* (Mk 12:33). This was the only instance in the Gospel where a teacher of the law was found in agreement with Jesus. Jesus responded to the scribe, *“You are not far from the kingdom of God”* (Mk 12:34). The kingdom of God had come in Jesus. Only He determined who was near in spirit to Him. No doubt it was an invitation to the scribe to enter the kingdom of God.

WHOSE SON IS THE MESSIAH?

At this point, Jesus took the offense. He put a question to the people that challenged the scribes’ concept of the Messiah. The scribes’ narrow emphasis on the Messiah being the “Son of David” misrepresented the messianic kingdom, and was responsible for the errors in belief concerning the Messiah. Jesus was conscious of a greatness which could not be ascribed to His descent from David, but rather, resulted from *His* unique relationship with His heavenly Father.

To the scribes’ insistence that the Messiah was the “Son of David”, Jesus responded, *“David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’ If David addressed him as ‘Lord,’ in what sense can he be his son?”* (Mk 12:35-37). Jesus exposed the narrowness of their thinking and called for a re-evaluation of the concept of the Messiah, one that was not limited to establishing an earthly kingdom, but was open to the Servant of Yahweh, resulting in a friendship with God. This teaching would lead to the acceptance of the divine son-ship of the Messiah, and was the step demanded of the scribe in order to enter the reign of God: he must accept the lordship of Jesus Christ.

The majority of the scribes would not come to this faith in Jesus. Mark ended the scribes’ public confrontation with Jesus with Jesus’ critical analysis of them. He charged them with ostentation, with an unhealthy craving for position and flattery; He accused them of having an unholy inconsistency between their lives of worship and their daily life. Because

they made a pretense of being religious men, their punishment would be greater than that of other sinners. Jesus' teaching served as a warning to the people to be aware of religious leaders who hide their inhumanity behind their titles and trappings of office, and their hypocritical displays of piety.

RICHNESS OF HEART

The day closed with a scene at the treasury in the temple. There Jesus called attention to a poor widow who deposited a few small coins. Jesus contrasted the poor widow with the Pharisees. Her outward appearance was poor but she was filled with inner richness, while the scribes and Pharisees appeared as great servants of God and rich in piety, but inwardly they were barren. She symbolized what it meant to love God totally. She gave to God all she had to live on. The poor widow was truly a symbol of Jesus of Nazareth.

Those who love God perfectly may have little or much to give. What matters is that they give their all to God and abandon themselves completely into the hands of God. God does not measure our gifts or service by that of others. The Lord seeks the degree of love in heart of the giver. Pope John XXIII understood the secret of the poor widow when he said, "The heart that loves always has something to give."

RAYS OF THE SETTING SUN

**SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS
SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK
(PLEASE MEMORIZE)**

*YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART,
WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR
STRENGTH. (Mk 12:30)*

FIRST DAY: Read Mark 12:1-12.

1. Why did Jesus reject the authority of the Sanhedrin?
2. What does the parable of the Wicked Tenants relate?
3. In what way is your own life a vineyard of the Lord?
4. What does God's love demand from the vineyard of our life?

SECOND DAY: Read Mark 12:13-17.

1. What was the intention of the Pharisees' asking Jesus about the tax?
2. Why is good citizenship a moral obligation?
3. If God sent you a bill for service rendered, what would you owe God?
4. In what way do you "render" to God His due?

THIRD DAY: Read Mark 12:18-27.

1. According to Jesus what is the fact of resurrection based upon?
2. How did Jesus' teaching differ from the Jewish expectation?
3. What happens spiritually when we fail to know the Scriptures and God's power?
4. Why does your love of God give you hope in your own resurrection?

FOURTH DAY: Read Mark 12:28-34.

1. According to this teaching what is the debt due to God from us?
2. What is implied by the “second” commandment being love of neighbor?
3. How do these two commandments destroy the spirit of legalism?
4. What would Jesus say about your relationship to the kingdom of God?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 12:35-44.

1. What does Jesus wish to illustrate by His question of the Messiah's origin?
2. What step was needed for the “good” scribe to enter the reign of God?
3. What do you think Jesus intended by the story of the Poor Widow?
4. What does this story teach you about God?

SIXTH DAY: Read Matthew 23:23-39.

1. Why do you think the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus as the Messiah?
2. How would you describe religious hypocrisy?
3. What would manifest this sin in a person's conduct?
4. In what way could you fall into this sin?

CHAPTER 14

THE PAROUSIA

INTRODUCTION

No chapter in the Gospel of Mark is more difficult to interpret than Chapter Thirteen. It presents a scriptural puzzle for many modern readers. This section of the gospel account is very Jewish, expressing its truth clothed in Old Testament terminology. These truths were certainly compiled by the early Church to deal with concrete religious problems within the early Christian Community. The Second Coming of Jesus was one of the major problems. Apparently, then as now, there was a great deal of fanaticism on this subject.

It is a dogma of Christian Faith that at the end of time, Jesus Christ will return to earth in glory as its Judge. It is a definitive teaching of the Church that the time of the Second Coming is unknown. In spite of the uncertainty of the time of the Parousia, people in the primitive days of Christianity counted very strongly on the probability of its imminent occurrence. The Greek word *parousia* means “presence” or “to become present”. Strictly speaking, the concept does not imply the *return* but simply the *appearance* of Jesus.

DAY OF THE LORD

At the time of Christ, the Jews believed that God would interfere with the history of mankind. Through God's direct exertion of power in the affairs of mankind, Israel would come to rule the world as befitting the People of God. They referred to this day as “the Day of the Lord”. The prophets and visionaries expressed this hope of Israel in apocalyptic writings describing dreams and visions which presented their revelations in symbolic images. They were not intended to be interpreted literally, but symbolically, as our nightly dreams should be. These works were known as “Apocalypses”. The Greek word *apokalupsis* means “an

unveiling”. These Apocalypses were intended to reveal that the sufferings of God’s people had been foreseen and permitted by Yahweh; they were the prelude for the coming of “the Day of the Lord”, when all evil would be destroyed and Israel exalted.

Chapter Thirteen of Mark appears to be a combination of the apocalyptic literary form and another form used as a farewell discourse, which itself conveyed certain teachings. It was believed that when great religious leaders approached death, they delivered their last will and testament. It spoke usually of things to come, the dangers and sufferings to be expected, along with exhortations to remain faithful and steadfast. These teachings were believed to flow from divine revelation, and offered a firm foundation for perseverance to disciples. If we are to understand these teachings, we must know what the images in this apocalyptic writing signify.

SIGNS AND FALSE MESSIAHS

The theme of the prophecies in this chapter is “*Be on your guard. Let no one mislead you*” (Mk 13:5). Apparently, some of the Christians were being misled into believing the Parousia had come. Others were hearing rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines as ominous signs that the end was near, reading into the news of wars among nations. Jesus teaches that these are not signs of the end, for “*such things are bound to happen, but this is not the end*” (Mk 13:7). They are common occurrences in the sinful world, and are not signs of the end of time.

Christians have work to do in this world. They must not lose sight of their mission even amidst great persecutions. They must bear witness to Jesus. They are to proclaim in word and deed the gospel message. All their trials will afford them opportunities to fulfill their mission. Their lives will be a witness to rulers, family, and neighbors. Persecution will drive them throughout the world, and the Gospel will be spread and proclaimed. This is what is important! This is their mission. Time must not be wasted studying signs and portents of the coming end, which only opens the doors to false messiahs who play upon their dreams and illusions. In the meantime, they neglect their mission.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

Jesus implies that the fall of Jerusalem will be a sign of *“the day of the lord.”* This phrase expresses that God directly enters into affairs of mankind. In order to express divine judgment and the national doom which follows, the Scriptures say *“the sun will be darkened and the moon will not shed its light, stars will fall out of the skies and the heavenly hosts will be shaken” (Mk 13:24).* This is a poetic portrait of what it means for God to interfere in the history of mankind. The Scriptures are not predicting that these events will actually occur. The Old Testament is full of such figures of speech.

Jesus foretells that the fall of Jerusalem will inaugurate a special manifestation of God in the world. It is a preparation for a “coming” that will not occur before the fall of Jerusalem. The fall will mark the end of an old order of time and precede the beginning of a new order. Jesus expresses in picturesque language the coming manifestation, *“Then men will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory” (Mk 13:26).* The Son of Man coming on the clouds symbolizes that the kingdom now to be established on earth is not an earthly kingdom, but one coming out of heaven. The expression “comes on a cloud” symbolizes the power of God. Isaiah speaks of God coming to judge Egypt as *“See, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud on His way to Egypt” (Is 19:1).*

This portrait of the Son of Man implies that Christ is assuming the seat of power at the right hand of God. The Messianic King rules not on an earthly throne, but a heavenly one, and the government of the world is committed to Him. It also implies that the “coming” of Jesus is not some single and isolated event, any more than sitting at God's right hand would be. *“Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth” (Mt 28:18).* This quotation teaches that Jesus assumes power in heaven and continuously exercises His power on earth.

GATHERING OF THE ELECT

The gathering of the elect from the four corners of the world would begin with the fall of Jerusalem. By the “gathering of this elect”, the kingdom of God *will* be established on earth. The angels of Jesus will accomplish this work. “Angel” means “messenger”. The name applies primarily to the

apostles who were sent in Jesus' name and, secondarily, to every disciple of Jesus who carries the gospel message. The concept of "the angels" also represents the invisible heavenly powers operating on this earth. There is a divine dimension to all the human efforts of the saints. The Presence of the Lord Jesus and His heavenly Hosts stands behind all the work done by members of the Church on earth.

Chapter Thirteen appears to teach that disciples are not to concern themselves about the end of the world, but rather about the coming of the kingdom--the gathering of the elect. The Kingdom of God comes through the apostolic efforts of the disciples of Jesus. Even the most negative elements in their lives, such as persecutions, offer an opportunity to witness to the Gospel, and to the spreading of the kingdom.

St. Mark's gospel account implies that the coming of the Holy Spirit was indeed a "Second Coming"--a second Presence of Jesus on earth--and this abiding Presence should be rapture enough for His disciples on this earth.

THE NEW COVENANT

With that introduction, Mark brings his readers into the last two days of Jesus' earthly life. Since the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, the chief priests, rather than the scribes, appeared as the protagonists against Jesus. They met and agreed to kill Jesus, but decided to delay their plans until after the feast of Passover, when many followers of Jesus would have departed the city. The feast of the Passover would be celebrated in two days.

However, something very unexpected occurred. Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve Apostles, came to the high priest and offered to hand Jesus over to them. The chief priests were jubilant with the news. This altered their plan of waiting until after the Passover. They decided to arrest Jesus whenever the treachery of Judas made it possible.

Jesus entered Jerusalem with the Twelve Apostles secretly, on the eve of Passover after dark had fallen. As they were reclining at the Passover meal, Jesus announced His coming betrayal as the fulfillment of the Scriptures.

Foreknowledge does not imply fore-willing. Judas moved freely to accomplish the evil of betraying Jesus. Therefore, *“woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been better for him had he never been born” (Mk 14:21).*

During the meal Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the Apostles.

“Take this” He said, “this is my body.” He likewise took a cup, gave thanks and passed it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many. 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 kingdom of God.”
(Mk 14:22-25)

It was a farewell feast, and Jesus told them that He will not meet them again until He shares the new wine of the Holy Spirit with them in the kingdom of God.

In early Hebrew society, written documents were rarely, if ever, used. The spoken word was invested with a ritual solemnity that gave the words a kind of concrete reality. The spoken word, once uttered, could not be annulled. We see in Genesis, when the dying Isaac blessed Jacob instead of Esau, the blessing could not be retracted once given (see Gen 27:27-38). A solemn ritual agreement between two parties served as a written contract and was called a “covenant”. A covenant must be seen as more than a contract; it establishes an artificial blood kinship between the parties, second only to the bond of blood. The contracting parties become one blood, one family through their covenant.

Frequently, the striking of the covenant was celebrated with a banquet. The meal did not establish the unity between the members of the covenant, but it celebrated and strengthened the unity. Food does not give life, it sustains life. Food taken in common can have a unifying power. This eating together brought peace to members of the covenant who previously may have been alienated from one another. Peace was the expected fruit of the unity that was achieved through the covenant.

At the Last Supper, Jesus clearly inaugurated a New Covenant with His disciples. Mark spoke of the Covenant, and alluded to the unity this covenant had effected. When he related the institution of the Eucharist, he referred to the Covenant. We read in the text that the Blood of Jesus is the Blood of the New Covenant, which is being shed for the remission of sins. According to Semitic custom, a covenant had to be sealed with blood. The Last Supper must be seen as a true covenant meal.

The early Christian Church realized that the Last Supper was the covenant meal of the new and perfect Covenant. And, because it is perfect, it both symbolizes and brings about unity between Christians and Jesus Christ, and between members of the Christian Community. It enables Christians to share in the very life of God through their union with Jesus Christ, and to become members of the Family of God. This union leads to peace with both God and neighbor. Understandably, the Eucharist is called "Holy Communion".

Once it is truly understood that the Holy Eucharist contains the true Body and Blood of Jesus Himself, it must be concluded that by partaking of it, the faithful are united in a real way with their Covenant Partner, Jesus Christ. The Holy Eucharist brings about what it symbolizes.

A consideration of the words "*This is my blood, the blood of the covenant*" leads to the same conclusion. In the Old Testament, blood is not a symbol of death but a symbol of life, in reality, Divine Life itself. According to Semitic understanding, all life comes from God as a gift and returns to God at the time of death. Blood was believed to be the seat of life. Because of this belief, living blood was used in sacrificial worship and as the means for the purification of a person or an object. To sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial victim was to bring all it touched into contact with God. To offer the blood of an animal was not seen as a symbolic offering of the life of the animal, but a true offering of its life, as its life was in its blood. In the Old Testament, the prohibition against drinking blood arose from this concept of its sacredness.

To receive the Blood of Jesus is to receive His life. When Jesus shares His Body and Blood with His disciples, He shares His entire being. He establishes a bond of friendship between Himself and the believers.

St. Augustine places these words on the lips of Jesus, “You do not change me into you as food of your flesh, but you are changed into me.” According to the teaching of St. Augustine, the Parousia comes through the Holy Eucharist. And, the Parousia does not come outside of the Christian Community, but within the Christian Community, through its believers.

THE PAROUSIA

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

FOR MY FLESH IS REAL FOOD AND MY BLOOD REAL DRINK. THE MAN WHO FEEDS ON MY FLESH AND DRINKS MY BLOOD REMAINS IN ME, AND I IN HIM. (John 6:55-56)

FIRST DAY: Read Mark 13:1-13.

1. What do you think is meant by the admonition “Be on your guard”?
2. What appears to be the problem facing the Christians at this time?
3. What good can flow out of persecution?
4. Who are the ones that will come safely through their trials and sufferings?

SECOND DAY: Read Mark 13:14-23.

1. What is meant in the Old Testament by “the day of the Lord”?
2. What do you understand by Mark 13:14?
3. What did the Fall of Jerusalem symbolically signify?
4. What were apocalyptic writings and their purpose?

THIRD DAY: Read Mark 13:24-37; Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4; Joel 3:1-5.

1. What does Parousia mean and what is the Catholic belief about it?
2. According to the Old Testament how should Mk 13:24-25 be interpreted?
3. What does “coming in the clouds with great power and glory” signify?
4. What does Mark 13:27 teach us?

FOURTH DAY: Read Mark 14:1-21.

1. What did the anointing of Jesus symbolize?
2. What do you learn about the disciples from their negative reaction?
3. Why do you think Judas betrayed Jesus?
4. What does “foreknowledge does not imply fore-willing” mean to you?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 14:22-25; 1Corinthians 11:17-30.

1. What does the New Covenant mean to you?
2. What was the purpose of the Covenant meal?
3. According to the Old Testament what did drinking living blood imply?
4. What does reception of the Eucharist symbolize and actually cause?

SIXTH DAY: Read John 6:52-71.

1. What do these texts teach you about the Eucharist?
2. Is there any hint here to what may have been Judas’ problem with Jesus?
3. In what way can it be said that the Holy Spirit is a parousia of Jesus?
4. What is your idea about the Second Coming of Jesus?

CHAPTER 15

THE PRICE OF REDEMPTION

INTRODUCTION

During the celebration of the Passover meal, the Jews praised God with the words of the Great Hallel (chant of praise, used especially at Passover) found in Psalms 113-118, and 136. The Passover celebration concluded with Psalms 114-118. Jesus said these psalms with His disciples for the last time before leaving the Cenacle (the Upper Room) for the Garden of Gethsemani. On the eve of His death, these psalms gave expression to the feelings and sentiments filling the heart of Jesus.

As Jesus left the Cenacle, He took the same path traveled by King David as he fled Jerusalem when his own kingship was threatened by his son, Absalom. Jesus and His disciples crossed the Kedron Valley to an olive grove called Gethsemani (meaning an oil press) on the west slope of the Mount of Olives. It was indeed a path of sorrow for Jesus as it had been for David. Upon leaving the Cenacle, Jesus informed His disciples, *“Your faith in me shall be shaken” (Mk 14:27)*, for they shall see the Good Shepherd struck down to the earth, and His apparent weakness and powerlessness will scandalize them. They will lose faith and hope in Jesus. But, the Good Shepherd will arise again from the earth and go before them to Galilee. At that time, He will lead them as the Risen Lord.

When Peter heard Jesus’ prophecy, he vehemently denied that it applied to him--perhaps to the others, but certainly not to him, *“Even if all are shaken in faith, it will not be that way with me” (Mk 14:29)*. Jesus, then, confirmed the truth of the prophecy, particularly in regard to Simon Peter, *“I give you my assurance, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.”* Peter remained adamant, *“Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you” (Mk 14:30-31)*. The others all echoed Peter. You cannot tell some people the truth about themselves; you have to let them experience the truth and learn the hard way.

AGONY IN THE GARDEN

Jesus knew a terrible hour of trial and testing had come for Him and, in a lesser degree, for His disciples. His repeated warning to them to be on guard and to pray went unheeded. They failed to follow His example. They rested self-complacently in their commitment to Jesus. He commanded them, "*Stay awake! Be on guard and pray that you may not be put to the test*" (Mk 14:38a). Jesus stressed the need to pray, "*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Mk 14:38b). Jesus prayed, and the Apostles slept.

We cannot appreciate the Passion of Jesus unless we realize how completely human the Son of God became through the Incarnation. He was humanity perfected and uncontaminated by sin. Human beings, harden and desensitized by sin, can never appreciate the depth of sensitivity and emotional response of one so perfectly human. As sin never touched and contaminated His human nature, His capacity to love and be loved had never been diminished. It is of the essence of human nature to love and to be loved. No human heart ever desired to love others and be loved by them more than the heart of Jesus Christ.

Our sinful environment appears to precondition our hearts. It seems as if we were born with our "guard up", with defense mechanisms that harden us and make us callous to an unloving environment. People become cautious about loving others who might be a source of pain. We sing "I am a rock and a rock feels no pain!" Perhaps it is a survival kit for an ungodly world.

Jesus had no defense or caution when it came to love. When we understand this, we can know to some degree how the public life of Jesus was filled with deep spiritual suffering, as people refused His gift of love and withheld their love from Him. Jesus saw no man as His enemy. All were children of God and created to be His brother, His sister, His friend. Jesus never alienated Himself from any human being. Bit by bit people alienated themselves from Him.

The Scribes and Pharisees were the first, and He was "*grieved at their hardness of heart*" (Mk 3:5), when they criticized Him because of His loving interpretation of the Law and His compassion for sinners. Then, there were His own kin and neighbors, whose hearts were too small to embrace

Him—*“They found him too much for them... He could work no miracles there, apart from curing a few who were sick by laying hands on them, so much did their lack of faith distress him” (Mk 6:3,5).*

Because of the truth He preached and the love of God He demonstrated, the leaders of the people saw him as a threat to their selfish world. *“What are we to do? For this man performs all sorts of signs? If we let him go on like this, the whole world will believe in him, and the Romans will come in and sweep away our sanctuary and nation” (Jn 11:47-48).* *“And therefore the chief priests and scribes began to look for a way to arrest him by some trick, and kill him” (Mk 14:1).*

The civil authority that should have protected Jesus turned Him over to His enemies because it was more politically expedient to be a “friend of Caesar” than of God. The crowds who had welcomed Him lost their enthusiasm for Him when He failed to fulfill their unrealistic dreams for national glory: *“This kind of talk is hard to endure! How can anyone take it seriously?” (Jn 6:60).* *“From this time on, many of his disciples broke away and would not remain in his company any longer (Jn 6:66).*

And lastly, those Twelve? They betrayed, denied and abandoned Him because they became afraid of being His friends.

There, in the Garden of Gethsemani, the psychological awareness of His complete and total aloneness and alienation reached its zenith. The disciples were physically present, but they were not truly one with Him. It was only a matter of time—only a few more moments—before they would physically desert Him, leaving Him to face His agony and death alone. Jesus *was alone* in the garden. This aloneness symbolized mankind's total rejection of Him, and the withdrawal of its love from Him.

The Heart that sought but to love and be loved must now love those who offer Him nothing but their hatred, their indifference, and their human frailty. Titanic waves of fear and distress engulfed His soul, *“and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Lk 22:44).* He confessed to Peter, James and John, *“My heart is filled with sorrow to the point of death” (Mk 14:34).* These words express the pain of one dying of sorrow from a broken heart. It is a heart that now confesses death is easier than life. He

asked the three of them to sustain Him and be with Him in this darkest moment. He truly needed them, *but* they slept while He suffered and prayed.

It was Jesus' prayerful wish to be delivered out of this terrible ordeal. *Abba (O Father), you have the power to do all things. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you would have it, not as I" (Mk 14:36).* In prayer He understood that His Father *willed* this cup of suffering. It *would not* pass Him by. It *must* be totally consumed. His prayer became one of submission. He found in His submission His victory over fear. It empowered Him to welcome willfully all that lay ahead. His majestic silence before His accusers symbolized His total submission to the Father's will. Jesus would be obedient "*even to death, death on a cross" (Phil 2:8).*

Calling God His "Abba" amidst all the darkness and pain that encompassed His soul reveals that Jesus still knows the loving care and concern of His Father for Him. His Father freed Him from fear, but only death would free the sorrow in His heart.

Mark writes for the Christians in Rome who were in the midst of a persecution that had claimed both the lives of Peter and Paul. He draws a contrast between the behavior of Jesus in the Garden and that of the three Apostles. He emphasizes that although Christians may believe they can rely on the fact of his or her spirit of willingness, they must be mindful of the weakness of human flesh. Mark implies that the disciples might have stood firmly by their Lord instead of forsaking Him at the time of His arrest, but it may not be just a coincidence that Peter denies Jesus three times and Jesus finds him asleep three times. When a disciple faces a trial beyond his or her personal strength, it is the time to pray for the needed grace. Seemingly God gives the grace to those who pray for it, but He does not grant it to those who do not seek it in prayer. Mark's message is there for all Christians: Watch and pray so when the hour of trial comes, you will faithfully endure.

THE TRAGEDY OF JUDAS ISCARIOT

From the wording of the Greek text, Judas greeted Jesus in the Garden with a profuse demonstration of friendship. At that moment all that the world had to offer Jesus was a pretense at friendship. The mystery of Judas? It remains forever hidden within the darkness of his own heart. John the Evangelist tells us that he was a thief. Is he the embodiment of the principle that no one can serve two masters without loving one and hating the other?

Jesus chose Judas, *"It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you"* (Jn 15:16). Jesus evidently had a preferential love for Judas. Judas was a most intimate companion of Jesus, but he rejected Jesus. Did he represent those who expected a material and worldly return for their discipleship, and became bitterly disappointed in Jesus? Perhaps he had chosen Jesus for all the wrong reasons. The Scriptures imply he dearly loved money to the degree of stealing it from those with whom he lived and worked, *"He held the purse, and used to help himself to what was deposited there"* (Jn 12:6). What went wrong as he walked along the Way? We will never know. We have only this sad comment by Jesus, *"Did I not choose the Twelve of you myself? Yet one of you is a devil"* (Jn 6:70). John testifies to the satanic possession of Judas, *"Satan entered into him"* (Jn 13:27).

As the evil of Judas' treachery came down upon him, he despaired and hanged himself. How clever the Evil One--he gives us the encouragement and help to do the evil deed, but leaves us alone to bear the consequences of our evil. If Judas had only repented! What an example to all sinners! What sinner would ever despair of reconciliation with God, if there had been the example of Judas' reconciliation with Jesus. Even in his death Judas stole!

JESUS ON TRIAL

Jesus was taken for trial before an unlawful assembly of the Sanhedrin. Instead of sitting as judges on the question of His guilt, they acted as a prosecuting body, seeking testimony by which to put Him to death. They found only false witnesses. The witnesses testified, *"We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands'"* (Mk 14:58). A plan by Jesus to

destroy the temple of Jerusalem would certainly have been interpreted as a revolutionary act. John the Evangelist insists that the Temple to be destroyed was Jesus' own body, which would then rise from the dead three days later as the new temple, "*not of this creation.*" This prophecy would be fulfilled by Jesus' death, and His resurrection from the dead.

The high priest questioned Jesus in regard to the accusation. Jesus' silence implied there was no substance to the accusation that warranted a reply. The high priest then moved on to the very heart of the matter, "*Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?*" (Mk 14:61). The highest religious authority in Israel demanded an answer to this question. The time had arrived for Jesus to make His confession before the highest tribunal of the Jewish nation. Silence now would have implied abdication of His claim as Messiah. Jesus responded to the Sanhedrin, "*I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven*" (Mk 14:62).

By reciting the language of Daniel 7:13, and applying it to Himself, it is as if he had said, "You will see in me the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies." It denoted the place Jesus would occupy in heaven, and it pointed out that there would be earthly evidence of this power. They were to see with their own eyes the advancing kingdom of the Son of Man on this earth. The prophecy denoted the intervention of Jesus as Messianic King in the affairs of the world. They would behold Him exercising this power. The high priest ripped his priestly robes in a dramatic protest to Jesus' response. He addressed the Sanhedrin, "*What further need do we have of witnesses. You have all heard the blasphemy. What is your verdict?*" They all concurred in the verdict, 'guilty' with its sentence of death" (Mk 14:63-64)

Jesus would die because He witnessed to the Truth. A main theme of Mark's gospel account is that Jesus only gradually unfolded the secret of His own Person to His disciples, and the disciples were slow to comprehend His teachings. It was only at the very end of His life, when He was on trial before the Sanhedrin, that Jesus revealed His true identity. After His testimony, Jesus made no secret of His claim. He admitted before Pilate that He was King. Mark will stress several times, it was the King of the Jews who was crucified.

SIMON PETER'S DENIAL

The very moment Jesus made the “good confession of faith” of His divine vocation before His enemies of the truth, Simon Peter denied the truth of his own vocation--a disciple of Jesus Christ. Three times Peter denied any association with Jesus of Nazareth. We are told, “*He began to curse, and to swear, ‘I do not even know the man you are talking about!’ (Mk 14:71)* Peter's faith had been fractured, and with it went his courage and honesty. Faith supported his courage, and fell along with it. Why should he run a risk for the hope that had failed him? At the sound of the crowing cock, Peter recalled Jesus’ prophecy of his denial, and he wept over his weakness. But Peter did not retract the denial. Jesus stood very much alone. The faithfulness of the Son of Man stands in sharp contrast to the unfaithfulness of human nature.

Mark gives to the Christian community these examples of how profession of faith in Jesus can lead to death. He emphasizes that any situation that calls for the confession of one's faith requires acknowledgement of that faith. When a disciple of Jesus is confronted, even by a servant girl, about his or her commitment to Jesus Christ, it must be confessed. When a disciple fails to confess, in word or deed, there is fault there. A person needs to examine the quality of his or her faith. “*Anyone who denies the son has no claim on the Father” (1Jn 2:23).*

DEATH OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

The Passion of Jesus Christ appears sober and concise in Mark's gospel account. He did not seek to arouse sympathy or hatred. He viewed the Passion primarily in the light of Psalm 22 and Psalm 69. The events of the Passion were not the product of human design or chance occurrence; the Will of God was the decisive factor behind these occurrences. As we read in Isaiah, “*If he gives his life as an offering for sin ... the will of the Lord shall be accomplished through him” (Is 53:10).* It is the incalculable price for the redemption of the human race. “*Because he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked, he shall take away the sins of man and win pardon for their offenses” (Is 53:12).*

Mark did not see physical suffering as constituting the real sufferings of Jesus; He did not describe it. Rejection and hatred are the cause of His true sufferings. Mark traces this rejection from Chapter Three, in every conceivable variation and increasing measure, culminating on the Cross along with the two men condemned to die with Him. Mark wrote, "*The men who had been crucified with him likewise kept taunting him*" (Mk 15:32). They even denounced their companionship with Him, and in so doing completed the absolute loneliness of His Passion. Jesus was even cut off from those who suffer with Him.

As the end of His life approached, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "'*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachtani?*' which means, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'" (Mk 15:34). These are the opening words of Psalm 22 that give a prayerful expression to the terrible and absolute loneliness Jesus was experiencing. Not only had human beings abandoned Him, but in this atmosphere of total hatred there was no awareness or experience of God. There was only the experience of abandonment by God. So much of the awareness and experience of God can come in this life only through people who are channels of His presence and His Love.

Psalm 22 expresses the anguish of the human spirit at the loss of God's awareness, but goes on to express its faith in the love of God that endures, even in the most adverse circumstances of life, and even when God is experienced only as the Absent One. This prayerful cry expresses waves of gratitude for continued faith in the God of love despite the realization that all the human resources of the soul have been exhausted. Is this not what Paul calls the "*hope against hope*" (Rm 4:18)?

Jesus' death is described in stark simplicity. There is no reference to an unshakable inner peace. One dying under such conditions could only die in agony! St. Therese of Lisieux observed "Our Lord really died as a victim of love, and see what his agony was! Our Lord died on the Cross in anguish, yet His was the most beautiful death of love. To die of love does not mean to die in transport."

Mark alone grouped together two events that happened at the death of Jesus: the rending of the temple curtain, and the exclamation of the centurion that Jesus was the Son of God. "*And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion who stood facing him,*

saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, 'In truth, this man was the Son of God!' (Mk 15:38-39). In the rending of the temple curtain, Mark sees that from the moment of Jesus' death God's presence was no longer the privilege of the Jews alone. The confession of the pagan centurion in the divinity of Jesus represents the Gentile People who will come to profess belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Mark presented what He saw as Jesus' greatest miracle--the conversion of the centurion, which occurs not because of the words and deeds of Jesus, but through the saving power of Jesus' death. The conversion of the centurion gives the real reason for the death of Jesus, "Through his sufferings, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear" (Is 53:11). And why shall this occur? Because "In truth this man was the Son of God."

IT IS FINISHED! Friends and disciples kept their distance. There are none to bury Jesus. According to Jewish law, a condemned criminal was to be buried in a common grave. However, a man called Joseph of Arimathea, a distinguished member of the Sanhedrin, was bold enough to seek an audience with Pilate and urgently request the body of Jesus. We read, "Joseph took him down, wrapped him in the linen, and laid Him in a tomb which had been cut out of rock" (see Mk 15:42-46). Some women who had followed Jesus from Galilee noted where Jesus had been buried.

BEFORE THE EMPTY TOMB

The Gospel of Mark ends before the empty tomb of the Risen Lord with these final words:

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought perfumed oils with which they intended to go and anoint Jesus. Very early, just after sunrise, on the first day of the week they came to the tomb. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked, they saw that the stone had been rolled back; for it was very large. On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the tomb, dressed in white robe. This frightened them thoroughly, but he reassured them, "You need not be amazed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, the one who was crucified. He

has been raised up, he is not here. See the place where they laid him. Go now and tell His disciples and Peter, [note: Peter is not mentioned, as a "disciple". He did publicly deny his discipleship] they are going ahead of you to Galilee, where you will see him just as he told you." They made their way out and fled from the tomb bewildered and trembling; and, because of their great fear, they said nothing to anyone.
(Mk 16:1-8)

The gospel account of Mark ends with this account. Scholars have determined that the remaining verses are a compilation of the events that are narrated in other gospel accounts.

The Gospel proclaims the astounding news--Jesus of Nazareth crucified has risen from the dead. If it was not so, the world would never have heard of Him. In the minds of Jesus' friends and disciples, His life had come to a tragic end, and in the minds of His enemies, it was a well deserved one. It was only the subsequent experience of a Risen Jesus that changed despondency to joy, and fear into courage. Twenty years after the fact, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*He was seen by over five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still alive*" (1Cor 15:6)

The disciples of Jesus were rewarded beyond human expectation. It took a while, no doubt, to assimilate what the resurrection of Jesus from the dead truly implied for mankind. But, once they grasped the truth, an inextinguishable fervor burned in their hearts to bring the "good news" to all people. Jesus Christ was now not just a memory from the past but a living Presence that will affect the lives of men and women until the end of the ages. Time would not dim His memory. Time is forever His moment.

Jesus commissioned the Church that He had established to bring the "good news" to all nations. The angel had proclaimed,

You have nothing to fear! I have come to proclaim good news to you, tidings of great joy to be shared by all the people ... a Savior has been born to you.
(Lk 2:10)

All are called to know the Lord Jesus Christ who loves them and gave Himself up for them. To Paul of Tarsus, the Lord clearly outlined the mission of His Church:

To open the eyes of those to whom I am sending you, to turn them from darkness to light, from dominion of Satan to God; that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.
(Acts 26:18)

Mark's gospel account is ended, not finished! Its study is not completed, it must go on. Mark leaves us before the empty tomb, within the shadows of the Cross, to continually contemplate the mystery of Jesus Crucified and risen from the dead--the Lord of the kingdom to come!

THE PRICE OF REDEMPTION

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND QUESTIONS SCRIPTURE OF THE WEEK (PLEASE MEMORIZE)

BE ON YOUR GUARD AND PRAY THAT YOU MAY NOT BE PUT TO THE TEST. THE SPIRIT IS WILLING BUT THE FLESH IS WEAK. (Mark 14:38)

FIRST DAY: Read Psalm 116, Psalm 118 and Mark 14:26-31.

1. How do these psalms express Jesus' sentiments before His death?
2. Why is Jesus' path of sorrow like that of King David?
3. What do you think caused the Apostles' faltering faith in Jesus?
4. To what would you attribute Peter's over-confidence?

SECOND DAY: Read Mark 14:32-42.

1. Why did Jesus personally suffer so intensely?
2. What do you see as the source of His greatest sorrow?
3. How does Jesus' conduct in the garden contrast with that of His Apostles?
4. What do you personally understand by Mark 14:38?

THIRD DAY: Read Mark 14:43-52.

1. How would you describe Judas' meeting with Jesus in the garden?
2. What do you understand by John 6:70?
3. What do you learn from John 13:27?
4. What do you learn about Satan's ways with people from Judas' death?

FOURTH DAY: Read Daniel 7:9-14 and Mark 14:43-52

1. If you were reporting the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin what would you report about it?
2. Why did the silent Jesus respond vocally to the high priest's last question?
3. What was Jesus implying when He referred to the prophecy of Daniel?
4. What lesson is there for the Roman Community in Peter's behavior at the trial of Jesus?

FIFTH DAY: Read Mark 15:1-41.

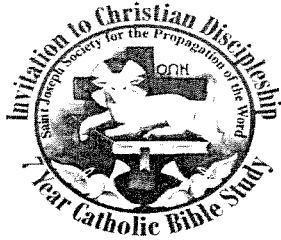
1. How does Jesus present Himself before the power of Rome?
2. How does Mark picture the Passion of Jesus?
3. How do you see Psalm 22 echoing the heart of the dying Jesus?
4. What do you think Mark is teaching in Mk 14:37-38 and 14:39?

SIXTH DAY: Read Mark 15:42 to 16:8.

1. If you were standing before the tomb of Jesus as a reporter, how would you describe the ending of Jesus of Nazareth on earth?
2. How does the death of Jesus affect His disciples?
3. How would you explain the disciples' reaction to the Resurrection?
4. Ending his gospel account with the death and resurrection of Jesus, what lesson do you think Mark desires to leave with his readers?

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