

TENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

June 10, 2018

First Reading – Genesis 3:9-15

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

Second Reading – 2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1

Gospel – Mark 3:20-35

My dear people of God:

Our first reading started with the Lord God asking where the man (Adam) was in verse 9. But we did not hear what happened before that. Chapter 3 of Genesis starts with the description of the serpent being cunning among all the animals (actually a reptile) that God created. But this chapter is more about the fall of man due to his disobedience.

For us to grasp the first reading more deeply, it would be beneficial for us to read the preceding verses. Verse 7 tells us that after eating (meaning: *not keeping or obeying the prohibition of not eating the forbidden fruit*) the man and the woman(Eve) realized that they were naked. They sewed together fig leaves and made loin cloths to cover themselves. Guilt and shame began.

Verse 8 tell us that they heard that God was moving about in the garden, they hid themselves. When God called the man, he answered that he was hiding because he was naked.

The succeeding dialogue tells us that when man was confronted with fear/shame, he blamed the woman who was supposed to be his companion and helpmate (not helper). We too, when we are confronted with fear/shame, and of our vulnerability, we have the tendency to place blame on someone other than ourselves. The adam (creature of dust) blamed the woman, and the woman blamed the snake. Poor snake! It had nobody to pass the blame unto someone else.

We sinful human beings may acknowledge our fear. But being clothed with the garments of God's care for us, we can see how we might respond with our weaknesses rather than by asserting power over others.

It is consoling though, to know, that the LORD God punished the serpent. But what is more consoling is the promise of the Lord to have another woman who will be at enmity between her and the snake; and between her offspring and that of the snake.

This will bring us to the realization of the greatness of the mercy of the Lord. The Responsorial Psalm beautifully says that: *With the Lord there is mercy, and fullness of redemption.* The first reading and the psalm offer us hope of forgiveness. Jesus in today's gospel will even say that. But we have to believe in His power to forgive.

Now, let us take a look at our Second Reading. Saint Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, declared that the ONE who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and place us in His presence.

This will cause the thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God. We know that any temporary/momentary light affliction will produce for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. But we need to look, not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.

Saint Paul succinctly declares that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, it is eternal and it is in heaven. In this click and drag generation, in this dotcom(.com) generation, everything is temporary, we are just browsing around. THIS (affliction, problem, trial) TOO WILL PASS.

Now, let take a look at our gospel. We are presented by the Evangelist Mark a story within a story. Mark interweaves two stories in one single account:

(one): the story of Jesus' family and their relationship to Him (3:21, 31-35). The family of Jesus is responding to reports that Jesus is insane, and they seek to restrain Him (3:21). But let me ask this question: Was the family of Jesus really ashamed of His actions? or Were they simply afraid of the religious authorities?

(two): the conflict of Jesus with the scribes who came from Jerusalem (3:22-30). They tried to undermine/sabotage Jesus, trying to undercut His authority; they said that Jesus worked by the power of Beelzebul; and that He had an unclean spirit (3:30).

It is not unusual for Mark to intertwine two stories. You may recall (1) the *raising back to life of Jairus' daughter* and; (2) the *healing of the woman*

with hemorrhage in chapter 5, verses 21 to 43. They are two stories narrated in one single narrative (Mark 5:21-43).

Jesus came home with his disciples. Please know that “HOME” here does not mean the home of Joseph and Mary. We could safely assume that Jesus had begun residing in Capernaum - no longer in Nazareth - probably in the house of Peter. We could also assume that such house had become the familiar venue of teachings and healing done by Jesus. People must have been frequenting that house. There was so much activity that it was impossible for *Jesus and His disciples to eat*. It was normal for the relatives of Jesus to be concerned: He was not the ordinary person they knew Him to be before His public ministry. He was preaching in a manner that was unheard of before; the authorities were out to discredit Him. The family may have felt some kind of embarrassment. But what was most hurting to them was the fact the scribes said that He was possessed by **Beelzebul** and that He was casting out demons by the prince of demons.

Before we go further, it would be beneficial for us to enumerate the marvelous deeds of Jesus as narrated by Mark:

1. Jesus cured a demoniac (1:23-28)
2. He healed the mother-in-law of Simon Peter (1:29-31)
3. He healed many people (1:32-34)
4. He conducted a preaching tour throughout Galilee (1:38-39)
5. He cleansed a leper (1:40-45)
6. He healed a paralytic in Capernaum (2:1-12)
7. He invited the tax collector (Levi) to follow him (2:13-17)
8. He bested the Pharisees in a controversy about fasting (2:18-22)
9. He bested them again in a controversy over plucking grain on the sabbath (2:23-28)
10. He healed a man with a withered hand (3:1-6).
11. He was followed by a huge multitude – something unheard of about any rabbi in the past (3:7-12)

Simply put: both the crowds and to the unclean spirits realize that Jesus was working by God’s power. We could not ignore the fact that when the crowds pressed around Him at the side of the sea, unclean spirits “***fell down before Him, and cried, ‘You are the Son of God!’***” (3:11). We must be clear about this; otherwise, we will lose the stinging statement of Jesus at the end of the gospel.

Despite the adulation that Jesus got from the crowds and despite the acknowledgment that unclean spiritus gave to Jesus being God, the scribes

refused to believe the evidence that established Jesus' Godly/divine credentials beyond any reasonable doubt. Jesus had an overwhelmingly positive response by the crowds, but the scribes and Pharisees have opposed Him (2:6-7; 2:16; 2:24; 3:1-6). While Pharisees (anti-Herod and anti-Roman) had little in common with Herodians (pro-Herod and pro-Roman), they both opposed Jesus and conspired to destroy Him (3:6). Jesus had to cope not only with opposition from scribes (who are usually allied with Pharisees) but also with the lack of belief from His own family. Or was it fear?

We know that Jesus was a very engaging person during His public ministry. He always engaged the crowds and had a powerful teaching/healing ministry, but He periodically withdrew from crowds for a quiet moment (1:35-37); and went to a desert (1:45).

But we must realize, my brothers and sisters, that Jesus never buckled down when attacked by scribes and Pharisees, but quickly mounted a stinging defense to the point of an attack. The evangelist Mark narrates in numerous instances when Jesus did just that. We could read that in 2:8-12; 2:17; 2:19-22 2:25-28; and in 3:3-5). It must have been an interesting moment to hear Jesus refute the defective/fallacious logic and "shallow/weak" knowledge of the scribes. Today's episode was one of those.

And here is Jesus, summoning them, saying: "*How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand; that is the end of him. But no one can enter a strong man's house to plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder the house*

. He refuted their accusation that He had an unclean spirit by destroying their erroneous logic. After

Amen, I say to you, all sins and all blasphemies that people utter will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an everlasting sin."

Mark said in verse 31-32 that His mother and His brothers arrived. The mention of the "brothers of Jesus" needs some explanation. Although this does not pertain to the theme of today, it is worth mentioning that when the Bible says brother, it does not necessarily mean siblings or children of the same parents. I am raising this issue so that it would be clear to us that Jesus had no blood siblings.

“Standing outside they sent word to him and called him. A crowd seated around him told him, ‘Your mother and your brothers and your sisters are outside asking for you.’”

There are some events in Jesus' life where His “brothers or sisters” are not mentioned. Here are two examples: (1) when Jesus was lost in the Temple, and (2) during his crucifixion. The Catholic Church teaches that the "brothers" of Jesus are not blood brothers or siblings.

Luke 2:41–51 reports the visit of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem when Jesus was 12 years old but does not mention any siblings. When Jesus got lost, Mary and Joseph rushed without hesitation straight back to Jerusalem: a thing which they would surely have thought twice about doing if there were other children (Jesus' blood brothers or sisters) to look after.

The Gospel of John records the sayings of Jesus on the cross: "*Woman, behold your son!*" and "*Behold, thy mother!*" (John 19:26–27), then states that "*from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home*".

The Catholic Church has always taught that after the death of Jesus there were no other biological children to look after Mary. Jesus entrusted her to the disciple, John. And it would have been against Jewish custom for Jesus to give His mother to the care of the disciple if Mary had other children. It would have been unlikely for Jesus to disregard family values and family ties if the four people named James, Joseph/Joses, Simon, Jude were indeed Mary's children.

So much for the issue of the “brothers of Jesus”.

Let us take a look at the statement that "*the scribes came down from Jerusalem*" in verse 22.

“Came down from Jerusalem” brings with it an interesting heavy tone. We know that Jerusalem is almost synonymous with “the religious authorities” who opposed Jesus. And the locus/situs of our gospel today is in Capernaum, which is north of Jerusalem. Capernaum is higher than Jerusalem on the map. But it is certainly correct to say that the scribes came down from Jerusalem to Capernaum because Jerusalem is on a mountain, and Capernaum is at sea level (the Sea of Galilee).

But more important is the fact that Jerusalem is the religious center of the Jewish world. For that matter, any gesture from Jerusalem to the lower places would mean a gesture of religious authority (and the weight which such

authority may bring) over any town. And that is why, it was so easy for the religious authorities to accuse Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul and to be casting out demons by the prince of demons (verse 22). Yet Jesus declared that “*all sins of the descendants of man will be forgiven, including their blasphemies with which they may blaspheme; but whoever may blaspheme against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin*” in verse 30. Jesus was about to pronounce a heavy judgment on the accusers, but He first affirmed the possibility of grace. He wanted to show them His authority as GOD, a thing that they missed.

It was blasphemous to use God’s name wrongfully in violation of the commandment (Exodus 20:7). It was blasphemous to show contempt for God or to curse God (Leviticus 24:15). The accusers were very aware what the Torah says: “*One who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer. Aliens as well as citizens, when they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death*” (Leviticus 24:16).

Interestingly, Jesus says: “*all sins of the descendants of man will be forgiven, including their blasphemies with which they may blaspheme*” in verse 28. He was very emphatic. But He immediately added: “*but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin*” in verse 29.

To speak with impious irreverence concerning God Himself or on anything that has some particular relation to God, or reviling against the Holy Spirit (which means resisting/opposing the convicting power of the Holy Spirit unto repentance), was a capital offense (Leviticus 24:16).

Brothers and sisters: we know that God forgives; but if we place ourselves into a situation where we resist His forgiveness, then forgiveness is no longer possible.

The scribes accused Jesus of doing evil. They should have known better. They were, after all, trained Biblical scholars, responsible for helping people to understand God’s law. They were surely aware of the miracles that Jesus has worked (1:21-28, 29-34, 40-45; 2:1-12; 3:1-6).

Unfortunately, while it was clear to most people that Jesus was performing miracles by the power of God, His accusers not only refused to see that, they sabotaged His works by saying that He performed His miracles by Beelzebul. They rejected the ONE who could have brought them forgiveness. They not only failed to see the light, but also called the light darkness.

We may ask: “Why is this sin unforgivable”? Because it the sin of refusing forgiveness”. These scribes refused to recognize what is good, they did not place a high value on it, they no longer strove for it. Having accused Christ of being satanic, they were not open to receiving His help, they were not candidates for the salvation that He offered.

At this point, it would be helpful to recall what Yahweh said in the Book of Isaiah, chapter 5, verses 8, 11, 18, 20, 21, and 23:

“Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, and wickedness as with a cart rope.... Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness.... Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isaiah 5:8, 11, 18, 20-21, 23). Then, Yahweh pronounced this judgment in verse 24: *“Therefore as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as the dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have rejected the law of Yahweh of Armies, and despised the word of the Holy one of Israel”* (Isaiah 5:24).

Finally let us take a look at the statement that *“His mother and his brothers came, and standing outside, they sent to him, calling him”* in verse 31.

My dear brothers and sisters: Please know that at this point, according to Mark, the mother of Jesus and His brothers were standing outside. They were portrayed as being on the side of the opponents of Jesus. Here is an instance when His mother and brothers are not supportive of Him. But Jesus asked: *“Who are my mother and my brothers?”* in verse 33. This sounded disrespectful, as if Jesus has disowned His mother and brothers, but that was not the case. Jesus did not ask this question to exclude His mother and brothers, but rather to set the stage for expanding the concept of family to include all those who do the will of God.

Obviously Jesus teaches that we, His followers must put God above family (which sometimes results in families divided over the issue of faith like what we can read in Matthew 10:37; Mark 10:29-30; Luke 12:52-53). Faithfulness to families is important, but faithfulness to God is even more important.

Brothers and sisters: God will forgive us if we believe in His power. And if we do the will of God, we will become members of the family of Jesus.

Amen.