



Well my dear Saints, I found today's Gospel reading interesting and a little confronting; how about you?

Sometimes when we read a passage we really need to reflect on it and seek out some theological commentaries in order to help us understand and interpret the message intended for us.

After the formal institution of the twelve apostles on the mountain, Jesus returns to a house situation. Many amazing things happen on mountain tops throughout the scriptures, however the serious teaching usually occurs when Jesus is seated, as with the Rabbi's. Here Jesus assumes the teaching position. Mark mostly portrayed Jesus as a teacher in his writings.

Jesus is faced with misunderstanding and misinterpretation that carries forward the conflict now building up around him, and issues related to Jesus conquering the power of Satan.

Throughout the scriptures there are many instances of evil spirits acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God; they are indeed a force to be reckoned with. We also see several instances of Jesus being tempted by the devil, however, good always overrides evil.

Once again we see the gathering of huge crowds around Jesus; as they enthusiastically meet around the house it makes it impossible for Jesus to even have a meal.

Jesus' Mother, brothers and sisters arrive to sort things out. Probably because of these huge gatherings of people that seem to be getting out of control, Jesus' family think that something strange is going on, they assume that Jesus has lost the plot and they come to take him home.

Of course Jesus sees this as interfering with his ministry and mission, just as the authorities are suspicious and many others of the old school, they don't see the whole picture.

Amazing, you can have something right under your nose and still not see it, Jesus' family still did not understand the full complexity of Jesus as the Son of God, here on earth; human yet divine.

Jesus' family feel that whatever Jesus is doing to attract such wild enthusiasm as a sign of dangerous derangement, hence their aim is to remove him from the situation and take him home where he belongs.

Jesus' family don't exactly regard him as possessed, however the scribes from Jerusalem with their explicit charge that Jesus is indeed possessed is a more serious misunderstanding.

This is a serious charge as it could result in a charge of practicing sorcery, a capital offence and made by legal authorities, who come from the national centre of power, Jerusalem.

Jesus rebukes these accusations, his association with Satan does not identify him as falling under the rule of Satan; as indicated by John the Baptist, Jesus is the "Stronger One", who, with the power of the Spirit, has come to liberate human beings from the captivity associated with Satan's rule.

In verse 28, Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven, but is guilty of an eternal sin". For they had said, (the authorities), that, "He has an unclean Spirit".

Also if someone does not believe, if they condemn the Spirit they obviously will not be seeking forgiveness of wrongdoings.

Next we see Jesus' family, his mother and brothers and sisters reappear in a further bid to take him home, to make contact with him.

Jesus' biological family come very much as outsiders at this point, they have to send a message through the crowd. Jesus makes no direct response but instead looks about, and identifies those sitting close by him as his mother and brothers, then adding more generally, that whoever does the will of God is "my brother, sister and mother".

This Markan text clearly puts the natural family of Jesus into the same category as those that misunderstand Jesus and seek to divert him from his mission. At the same time we see Jesus surrounded by a new family, defined as those who do the will of God.

Doing God's will in this instance means understanding and acting in accordance with God's will, as the new Kingdom of God is emerging and breaking through and as I just said, this places Jesus' natural family in the same position as the old era that the new Kingdom is supplanting.

Those who do God's will by giving themselves to this new Kingdom find themselves in a new family gathered around Jesus. Mark shows the control exercised by the closest human relationships can inhibit full dedication to the Kingdom. Having said this, we find the negative implication that Jesus shows toward his family as troubling for us.

If we are looking for a rich theology of family life in the NT, we won't find it in Mark's Gospel. Whatever may have been the attitude of Jesus, we find Mark has strong views and possibly reflects the situation of the community for which he wrote, where commitment to the Gospel requires a huge sacrifice, nothing interferes with the growing of the Kingdom, not even family.

We must remember that this is not written for us today, to directly follow, as it was written in a different time, in different circumstances and a different culture.

However, we are reminded that as followers of Jesus we must love him above all and be obedient to his will. Last Sunday I covered this point in more detail, as I believe that our Family is from God and therefore our relationship with them is God filled, we need to care for them and support them.

My Spiritual director and I had many conversations around Mark's attitude and I believe that spending time with a family member or friend that needs support is actually doing God's will, even though it appears to be taking us away from church activities and commitments.

As we maintain this powerful commitment to Jesus in our hearts, we are indeed doing His will as we care for others.

Derek and I often do Morning Prayer via zoom with the Singleton Parish and last year when my daughter was dealing with anxiety issues, she would often ring me early on her way to work as she was feeling anxious about her day, so I would miss MP, however I felt that this was indeed my 'Morning Prayer'. Even though I did miss it, I knew that Jesus was pleased that I spent that time with my daughter, listening mostly, and providing her with reassurance and support.

Our family and friends are a gift to us from God and we do have an obligation to care for them and support them, as we see in the Ten Commandments, honour your Father and Mother.... And all the things we must not do to others, like stealing, killing etc. I don't try to twist the scriptures to suit myself and our situation, but I do seek theologians' understandings and reflections to find the true meaning of difficult passages of scripture.

Sometimes I don't find logical outcomes and just accept the words as they are, especially in some of the Old Testament readings, I'm sure you know the ones, especially Kings, Judges, Joshua and more, if you want a bloodthirsty and lusty tale there are many in the OT.

This a whole new sermon for another day, and I would need intensive preparation!!!

I would encourage you to reflect on the readings again when you go home, especially the Gospel reading, snuggle up in a nice cosy chair with a cuppa and see how the Spirit speaks to you.

As we reflect on this reading, we need to move forward, with the Spirit as our guide.
Always seeking the truth, always questioning misunderstandings and misinterpretation.

It is often in this time of silent reflection that we discover God's will for us as we continue our Jesus journey through this troubled and broken world. Everyone has a story to tell, let us be filled with God's love, compassion and wisdom on our journey as we strive to make a difference in His name.

And, I close with last Wednesday morning's collect:

Eternal God and Father, by whose power we are created and by whose love we are redeemed:

Guide and strengthen us by your Spirit, that we may give ourselves to your service,

And live this day in love to one another and to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen