

Scripture Study

Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B



Opening prayer

Genesis 3:9-15

(Ps 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8)

2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1

Mark 3:20-35

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday marks our return to the liturgical season of Ordinary Time where we will mostly be hearing the Gospel Reading each Sunday from the Gospel of Mark. Our reading for today occurs immediately after Jesus appoints the twelve apostles. Recall that right before that, Jesus had attracted large crowds due to his growing fame as a healer and an exorcist (Mark 3:7-12)
- The reading starts out with Jesus and his apostles being so completely occupied in ministering to the large crowds that they are unable to even eat. His relatives set out to take charge of him because they fear he may be “out of his mind.” The expression may also mean they feared he was possessed.
- The scribes (legal experts on the Jewish law) accuse Jesus of being possessed by Satan and casting out demons by his power. Jesus points out the illogic of their charge which would have Satan working against himself. He also warns them against “blaspheming the Holy Spirit,” which in this case means denying God’s power at work in Jesus (it can also manifest itself in the sins of despair, presumption, and final impenitence, that is, ending one’s life failing to repent of our sins and turning to God).
- The episode ends with the arrival of Jesus’ relatives (including his mother), giving Jesus an opportunity to teach that a disciple’s relationship to him depends on their willingness to conform to God’s will.

Questions:

- In the first reading, what is Adam’s excuse for his disobedience? Who is he *really* blaming (verse 12)? How can this be related to “blaspheming the Holy Spirit (of God)”?
- In the second reading, St. Paul talks about earthly afflictions, but he also testifies that he is not discouraged or focused on the hardships. In what does he place his hope? (verses 4:14-15, 17-18, 5:1)
- In the Gospel reading, what might be the most likely motivation for the scribes to accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan? Unbelief? Jealousy? Why?
- What makes blasphemy of the Holy Spirit the unforgivable sin as compared to other sins?
- What does Jesus say makes someone his brother, sister, or mother? How does this not exclude, but rather is exemplified by his biological mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary? (see Luke 1:42-49)
- Why did Jesus’ relatives think he was “beside himself”? Have you ever been criticized for being “too religious”, or have you accused someone else of being so? What was the truth in either circumstance?
- Who is the “strong man” in verse 27? If a “strong man” has gained a foothold in some area of your life, how can he be bound?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 500, 539, 548, 574, 1864

Closing prayer

“We are convinced beyond doubt that the truths of faith cannot deceive us; yet we cannot seem to bring ourselves to trust in them. It is easier for us to trust in human reasons and the deceiving appearances of the world. This, precisely, is the reason for our poor progress in virtue and in all that pertains to God’s glory.”

--St. Vincent de Paul

Remember to read and meditate this week on the daily Mass readings!

"All sins will be forgiven except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit"

Scripture: Mark 3:20-35

Meditation: When danger lurks, what kind of protection do you seek? Jesus came to free us from the greatest danger of all – the corrupting force of evil which destroys us from within and makes us slaves to sin and Satan (John 8:34). Evil is not an impersonal force that just happens. It has a name and a face and it seeks to master every heart and soul on the face of the earth (1 Peter 5:8-9). Scripture identifies the Evil One by many names, 'Satan', 'Be-el'zebul – the prince of demons', the 'Devil', the 'Deceiver', the 'Father of Lies', and 'Lucifer', the fallen angel who broke rank with God and established his own army and kingdom in opposition to God. Jesus declared that he came to overthrow the power of Satan and his kingdom (John 12:31). Jesus' numerous exorcisms brought freedom to many who were troubled and oppressed by the work of evil spirits. Jesus himself encountered personal opposition and battle with Satan when he was put to the test in the wilderness just before his public ministry (Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1). He overcame the Evil One through his obedience to the will of his Father. Some of the Jewish leaders reacted vehemently to Jesus' healings and exorcisms and they opposed him with malicious slander. How could Jesus get the power and authority to release individuals from Satan's influence and control? They assumed that he had to be in league with Satan. They attributed his power to Satan rather than to God. Jesus asserts that no kingdom divided against itself can survive for long. We have witnessed enough civil wars in our own time to prove the destructive force at work here for the annihilation of whole peoples and their land. If Satan lends his power against his own forces then he is finished. Jesus asserted his authority to cast out demons as a clear demonstration of the reign of God. God's power is clearly at work in the exorcisms which Jesus performed and they give evidence that God's kingdom has come.

What kind of spiritual danger or harm should we avoid at all costs? Jesus used the illustration of a strong man whose house and possessions were kept secure. How could such a person be overtaken and robbed of his goods except by someone who is stronger than himself? Satan, who is our foe and the arch-enemy of God, is stronger than us. Unless we are clothed in God's strength, we cannot withstand Satan with our own human strength. What does Satan wish to take from us – our faith and confidence in God and our allegiance to follow God's law. Satan is a rebel and a liar. Satan can only have power or dominion over us if we listen to his lies and succumb to his will which is contrary to the will of God. Jesus makes it clear that there are no neutral parties in this world. We are either for Jesus or against him, for the kingdom of God or against it. There are two kingdoms in opposition to one another – the kingdom of God's light and truth and the kingdom of darkness and deception under the rule of Satan. If we disobey God's word, we open the door to the power of sin and Satan's influence in our lives. If we want to live in true freedom from the power of sin and Satan, then our "house" – our mind and heart and whatever we allow to control our appetites and desires – must be occupied and ruled by Jesus Christ where he is enthroned as Lord and Savior. Do you know the peace and security of a life submitted to God and to his word?

What is the unforgivable sin which Jesus warns us to avoid? Jesus knows that his disciples will be tested and he assures them that the Holy Spirit will give them whatever grace and help they need in their time of adversity. He warns them, however, that it's possible to spurn the grace of God and to fall into apostasy (giving up the faith) out of cowardice or disbelief. Why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit reprehensible? Blasphemy consists in uttering against God, inwardly or outwardly, words of hatred, reproach, or defiance. It's contrary to the respect due God and his holy name. Jesus speaks of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit as the unforgivable sin. Jesus spoke

about this sin immediately after the scribes and Pharisees had attributed his miracles to the work of the devil instead of to God. A sin can only be unforgivable if repentance is impossible. If people repeatedly closes their eyes to God, shuts their ears to his voice, and reject his word, they bring themselves to a point where they can no longer recognize God when he can be seen and heard. They become spiritually blind-sighted and speak of "evil as good and good as evil" (Isaiah 5:20).

To fear such a state of sin and spiritual blindness, however, signals that one is not dead to God and is conscious of the need for God's grace, mercy, and help. There are no limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who refuses to acknowledge and confess their sins and to ask God for forgiveness, spurns God's generous offer of mercy, pardon, grace, and healing. Through their own stubborn pride and willfulness, they reject God, refuse his grace and help to turn away from sin, and reject the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to heal and restore them to wholeness. God always gives sufficient grace and help to all who humbly call upon him. Giving up on God and refusing to turn away from sin and disbelief results from pride and the loss of hope in God.

What is the basis of our hope and confidence in God? Through Jesus' death on the cross and his victory over the grave when he rose again on the third day, Satan has been defeated and death has been overcome. We now share in Christ's victory over sin and Satan and receive adoption as God's sons and daughters. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Lord enables us to live a new life of love and freedom from slavery to sin. The Lord Jesus is our refuge and strength because he makes his home with us (John 15:4) and gives us the power and help of the Holy Spirit. Do you take refuge in the Lord and allow him to be the Ruler of your life?

"Lord Jesus, you are my hope and salvation. Be the ruler of my heart and the master of my home. May there be nothing in my life that is not under your lordship."