

Contexts

Mark's Gospel

- Composed between 65-70 CE
- Generally accepted as the first Gospel written.
- Authorship is unclear but possibly written by John Mark, the companion of Peter in Rome.
- Begins with the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness, then the Baptism of Jesus, then Jesus battling the forces of evil in the wilderness.
- First action of Jesus is to establish a community to establish the kingdom of God.
- Major work of this community is the work of healing and restoring God's right order, as opposed to the order of Rome, or the order established by the scribes and Pharisees, or religious and cultural norms of the time.
- Cleansing & healing stories restore people to their proper (rightful) place in the Kingdom and in human society (no longer outcasts, despised, unclean, etc).
- The right order of God's kingdom shatters and goes beyond the human and religious limitations placed on some of God's beloved sons and daughters.
- There is a characteristic starkness in Mark's Gospel – it is the shortest of the 4 canonical Gospels.
- Often the story is told by contrast – who is truly blind: the blind beggar or the seeing disciples, etc.

Mark 3:20-35 – things to notice

- Jesus went home – which home? The one in Capernaum or the one in Nazareth? Does not seem to be the house of Mary & Joseph as later in the passage they 'set out' to take charge of him; and later still, they appear 'outside' the house, asking to see him. Note that the Greek means simply 'a house'.
- Jesus' popularity - huge crowd gathers, no time even for a meal.
- Jesus – an embarrassment to his family - Jesus' relatives hear about this and set out to take him in charge, convinced he is 'out of his mind'. They seem to regard that whatever Jesus is doing to attract such wild enthusiasm from the crowd is a sign of dangerous derangement. They want to remove him from the situation, take him home where he belongs (BB).
- The charge of the scribes – Jesus is possessed by Beelzebul (Satan) and casts out devils in his name. This serves as a parallel, if more serious, misunderstanding than that of the relatives.
- Jesus rebuts the accusation firstly with simple common-sense sayings about the fall of divided kingdoms and households. Secondly, no one can plunder a strong man's house unless he has already tried up the strong man.
- Jesus' exorcisms are exactly about tying up Satan and plundering his house in the sense of releasing, healing and restoring all who are in his power.
- The unforgivable sin - Jesus warns of the seriousness of accusing him of being an agent of Satan – identifying the Holy Spirit of God with the unclean spirits of the demonic world. "Since the Spirit at work in Jesus is the agent of salvation, to persevere in denying the presence of that Spirit or identifying it with the adversarial power is to effectively place oneself out of the reach of salvation and so of ultimate forgiveness." (BB)
- Jesus' new family – the relatives (including Mary) arrive (notice: they are *outside*) and have to send a message to Jesus through the crowd, asking to see him. Jesus does not answer the request but looks around at those seated in front of him

(notice: they are *inside*) and says that his family is here before him, those who do the will of God are his family members.

- This new family is formed, not by blood relationship, but by the common bond of doing God's will.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on for the 10th Sunday?

Immediately before this passage from Mark Jesus has chosen his 12 disciples, naming them 'apostles' (from the Greek *apostolos*, meaning 'person sent' or 'emissary').

Returning to 'a house' a chaotic scene unfolds begging with the extraordinary popularity of Jesus then introducing two groups who seek to end his mission – his family and the scribes from Jerusalem.

The first reading from Genesis (3:9-15) introduces the character of Satan as one opposed to God's will for salvation for Adam and Eve (humankind). So, Satan is revealed not only as an enemy of God but also of human beings.

Returning to the Gospel, now that the disciples have been chosen, Jesus comes down from the mountain and returns home....

Reflection - The new family of Jesus

Today's Gospel opens with the chaotic scene of a huge crowd gathered around the house where Jesus is. It's such a busy scene that Jesus and the disciples have no time even to have a meal.

The spectacle provokes both the relatives of Jesus and some scribes from Jerusalem into action. The relatives think Jesus is mad; the scribes think he is possessed.

Intentionally or not, both the relatives and the scribes seem intent on closing down the mission of Jesus.

The relatives, convinced that Jesus is out of his mind, and quite possibly embarrassed at the spectacle he is making of himself, set out to take charge of (capture) him, probably intending to take him back to Nazareth and sort him out.

The scribes from Jerusalem try to close down Jesus' mission by accusing him of being in league with the devil, using Satan's power in his healing miracles. Jesus points out how absurd this claim is since the miracles he works with the power of the Holy Spirit bring healing, freedom and liberation, not deeper enslavement to the power of evil. A house divided against itself, he says, cannot stand.

Jesus also tells a parable about a strong man and a burglar. Most people would think that the strong man is Jesus and the burglar is Satan. In fact, it is the other way around! Using the power of God, it is Jesus who has tied up Satan and breaks into his house to free those imprisoned by evil.

Jesus warns of the seriousness of accusing him of being an agent of Satan – identifying the Holy Spirit of God with the unclean spirits of the demonic world.

Then the family of Jesus now appear, *outside* the house. Unable to get to him because of the crowd, they send a message to him, asking to see him. Jesus doesn't respond directly to the request but asks and answers the question, "who are my mother and brothers?" Pointing to the people gathered around him *inside* the house, Jesus says, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother." The old family is left outside, and the new family of Jesus is gathered with him inside.

Being part of the family of Jesus doesn't depend on blood relationship with him but on recognising that he comes from God and doing God's will.

Belonging to the new family of Jesus is joining him in the business of incarnating, making real in flesh and blood, God's deep love and mercy for all his people.