

Is Jesus “crazy”?!

Today’s Gospel story from Mark is bluntly stark. We’re told that Jesus’ own family has come to take him home to Nazareth because of reports about the words and works he has done and the notoriety they have engendered. In fact, Mark tells us, Jesus’s relatives (and quite possibly Mary his mother among them) believe him to be “out of his mind” (Mk. 3:21). The religious authorities even posit that his words and works are those of the devil. What is going on here?

Unlike the later gospel accounts of St. Matthew and St. Luke which have “pre-gospel” introductions comprising the familiar stories surrounding the annunciation and birth of Jesus, St. Mark’s gospel begins abruptly with the adult Jesus’ announcing: “Repent. The Kingdom of God is at hand.” Being the first gospel account written, Mark doesn’t “mince any words” when it comes to the challenge Jesus delivered to his disciples, to the religious authorities of the day who factor in today’s story, and even his own blood relatives.

During these next months of Sundays in “Ordinary Time”, except for a four weeks where we will listen to Jesus’ teaching on his being the “Bread of Life” from the sixth chapter of St. John’s Gospel following the story in Mark of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, St. Mark’s Gospel will be our guide in reflecting on and living out our relationship with Jesus until Advent. This presents us with two additional points for reflection.

First, choosing to follow Jesus demands following him on his terms believing at the very core of our being that he is the divine Son of God whose authority comes directly from the Father and who has passed that same teaching authority to the apostles and their successors, the bishops, under the headship of the successor of Peter, the Pope. While the religious authorities in the gospel passage try to attribute Jesus’ work to the devil, today the temptation by the devil as in the story of Eve’s temptation in the first reading, is more subtle but equally deadly. Eve, and in turn Adam, fell prey to pride, to choosing something other

than God as their primary relationship in turn “making themselves gods knowing both good and evil” (Gn. 3:5). Today on many fronts and in many ways the temptation is to craft our own version of God, of Jesus, of the Church, to “make ourselves gods” deciding for ourselves what is right or wrong on particular moral issues or in matters of faith. This is the error of relativism. No political party, no corporate business, no social circle of associations, no media outlet can be allowed first priority in our lives. We cannot live divided loyalties Jesus asserts. Either we are with him or against him.

Second St. Paul in today’s epistle, as well as the example of many of the saints of the church down through the last two millennia, who knew both ridicule and rejection for the choice to follow Jesus, assures us that this “momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comprehension” (2 Cor. 4:17). That glory is being numbered by Jesus as one of his “family”—a family whose bond rests not in shared DNA but in common cause for the sake of proclaiming and continuing the work of building the Kingdom of God in the world. Those who so choose Jesus are, as he says, “my brother, my sister, my mother” (Mk. 3:35).

So, is Jesus crazy? Even worse, is he in league with the devil? Or is Jesus one in whom God is full present, bringing salvation (healing/wholeness/mercy) to the world? How do you cast your vote? Where do you place your allegiance? These are the questions we will encounter again and again as we journey with the Jesus of St. Mark’s Gospel. Who is Jesus? And how much is each of us willing to risk to be “all in the family”?

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