

*Lectio Mark* Parish-Wide Study

**Homily Talking Points**

**Week 1: Saint Mark the Evangelist**

* The Gospel of Mark is the shortest Gospel and is often overlooked—Saint Augustine called it an “abbreviated” version of Matthew’s Gospel—but it has something special to offer.
* Unlike the other Gospels that contain long discourses, theological ideas, etc., Mark’s Gospel is action-packed—the “Hollywood Gospel”.
* The identity of Saint Mark reveals much about his writings.
* Many clues throughout the New Testament tell us that Mark was an important figure in the early Church.
* Peter, our first Pope, was a fisherman—not a scribe, he wasn’t fluent in Greek or Latin, so his account of Jesus’ life was written by someone who was educated and spoke Greek and Latin: Mark.
* The early Church considered Mark’s Gospel to have the teaching authority of Saint Peter; it is Apostolic, like Matthew and John (who were Apostles) and Luke (who was a close associate of Paul).
* Saints Peter and Mark were in Rome suffering great persecution under Emperor Nero. Mark’s Gospel emphasizes the key theme of suffering and the cross as the way of discipleship.

**Week 2: Prepare the Way of the Lord**

* There are many textual clues that Mark’s Gospel is Peter’s account of Jesus’s life; including the vivid details Mark supplies such as the time of day an event took place, the greenness of the grass, etc.
* Mark’s Gospel emphasizes the divinity of Jesus, beginning with his Baptism by John in the Jordan.
* Theophany, a visible manifestation of God, occurs at Jesus’s Baptism—the Father’s voice, “This is my beloved Son,” the “Spirit descending” and the Son Incarnate.
* The call of Mark’s Gospel is “repent and believe.”
* “Repent” is the Greek word *metanoia,* meaning “transform mind”. Believe” means to trust with the heart.
* We are called to this radical *metanoia* in the way we think, speak, and act, which is only accomplished through a deep trust in Jesus’s identity and the Lord’s love for us.

**Week 3: Come, Follow Behind Me**

* Jesus extends a compelling invitation to his Apostles to “come follow behind.”
* How is “following” different from “following behind”? The invitation to “follow behind” includes the reassurance that Jesus will go *before* them.
* He will lead the way, especially in suffering.
* We, too, are invited to follow Jesus with the reassurance that Jesus has gone before us, knowing firsthand all that we may encounter and suffer.
* Sometimes we try to take the lead, causing us to go astray.
* We must remember that our relationship to Jesus is as a disciple to a master.
* We see also in Mark’s Gospel that Jesus heals the sick, including lepers. Lepers are isolated from the community, but Jesus heals the leper and takes his place on the outskirts of town.
* Jesus takes on our suffering so that we may live abundantly.

**Week 4: Feasting and Fasting**

* Before Jesus, no Jewish teacher could offer a definitive interpretation of Scripture—they could only teach opinions.
* When Jesus teaches in the synagogue, the Jews wonder at his authority and while many begin to believe, many also question his authority—particularly in regard to why Jesus and his disciples do not fast.
* Jesus responds: “As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.” (Mark 2:19)
* Jesus puts himself in the place of the bridegroom and likens his table fellowship with his followers (including sinners) as a wedding banquet.
* He reveals himself as the redeemer, the divine bridegroom who comes to espouse his people and save them from their sins.
* Jesus came to offer his body on the Cross for his bride and shower mercy on all who desire it.
* Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, we must recognize our need for mercy, our need for redemption by our loving Bridegroom.
* This is the call to conversion—not so much the call to dedicate ourselves to striving for virtue and perfection, but a call to open our hearts to desire God’s mercy and be changed by his love and grace.

**Week 5: Binding the Strong Man**

* Jesus appoints the Twelve.
* The fundamental description of discipleship in Mark’s Gospel is “to be with him.”
* We are invited into discipleship with Jesus in our lives, meaning we are invited simply “to be with him.”
* The first vocation of the disciple is prayer.
* The Lord offers many ways for us “to be with him”:
  + Prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament
  + Praying with God’s Word (*lectio divina*)
  + Abiding with God all throughout one’s daily life: “The foundation for discipleship is living one’s life in the heart of the Trinity, in communion with each Person of the Trinity.” – Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila

**Week 6: The Parable of the Sower**

* The parable of the sower is one of the only long discourses of Jesus’s teaching Mark records.
* It may be familiar to us, but we should each take time this week to read this passage again, slowly, to do our best to hear what God wants to tell us.
* This parable lays the groundwork for how to understand the rest of Jesus’s parables.
* In regards to this mode of teaching, he says to his Apostles: “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again and be forgiven’” (Mark 4:11–12).
* Jesus doesn’t force us to see, to hear, or to understand; he invites us.
* The parable of the sower speaks about how we receive God’s invitation.
* When we read this passage, we should ask ourselves: what kind of soils is my heart most like right now?

**Week 7: Faith Not Fear**

* Throughout our lives, we meet many, varying trials—losing a job, the sickness or death of a family member, loss of financial stability, natural disasters, etc.
* In these “storms” of life, we have the choice to face them with faith or with fear.
* Faith is an openness to God, inviting him to work in our interior hearts and in the exterior circumstances of our lives.
* Fear, or lack of faith, restricts what God can do in our lives because he does not force himself on us.
* Think of the woman with the hemorrhage—many people were touching Jesus, but only she touched him with faith and was healed.
* We are able to touch Jesus in the Sacraments.
* Our disposition of faith or lack thereof affects how God’s grace is able to work in us through the Sacraments.

**Week 8: The Mystery of the Bread**

* We see that as Jesus journeys with the Apostles, the Twelve are very slow to understand his teaching and his identity.
* Almost back to back, Mark gives us two miraculous instances of the multiplication of loaves which emphasizes that the Apostles are quick to forget.
* This is similar to the Twelve tribes of Israel who continually forget all the good things the Lord has done for them.
* It usually takes many encounters with the Lord for us to understand who he is.
* But the daily miracle of bread that God performs for us, the Eucharist, offers the opportunity to encounter Jesus again and again.
* Encourage the congregation to spend time with Jesus in the Eucharist often and to receive him as often as possible.

**Week 9: The Way of Discipleship**

* As Jesus and his disciples make their way to Jerusalem where he will give his life. He predicts his Passion and Death three times with increasing specificity.
* Jesus is showing his Apostles and us what the way of discipleship entails—discipleship is cruciform.
* Jesus is not preaching a prosperity gospel—if we are truly following Christ, we should expect the pain and suffering of the cross.
* The cross of discipleship is placed upon us by Christ.
* Oftentimes, being a disciple calls us to choose suffering for the sake of others—like Jesus in his life and Passion.
* Being Jesus’s disciple means being servant to all.
* How can we serve our families, friends, coworkers, and neighbors better this week? How can we offer the service we are already rendering to God as an act of discipleship?

**Week 10: Jesus and the Temple**

* Today we’ll talk about two confrontations that take place in the last week of Jesus’s life: Jesus’s cleansing of the Temple and the Pharisees’ question about taxation.
* The Temple was the place where God dwelt with his people—for Jesus, the Temple was truly his Father’s house.
* Out of respect and jealousy on behalf of his Father, Jesus is justly enraged at the way the Temple was being used as a marketplace.
* Additionally, the noise, busyness, and smell (think of all the animals being sold for sacrifice!) would greatly interfere with the faithful’s ability to pray, worship, and listen to the voice of God—the real purpose of the Temple.
* Jesus drives out the money-changers in order to reclaim for his Father what is his and render his Father’s house a place where his people can truly encounter him.
* Saint Paul tells us: “Do you know not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16)
* If we are now God’s Temple, the place where he dwells. Are our souls a quiet, peaceful place in which to encounter God, or are we letting the noise, busyness, and anxiety of life hinder us from abiding with God?
* The Pharisees try to entrap Jesus by asking whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar.
* Jesus amazes them with his response, relaying that because Caesar’s image is on the coin, they ought to render to Caesar what is his.
* That answer bears with it a complementary truth—that which bears the image of God must be rendered to God.
* We each bear the image of God in our very selves. Are we rendering ourselves to God by returning the gift of our lives to him, placing all that we are at his disposal?

**Week 11: Signs of the End**

* Last week we talked about giving our entire selves to God because we belong to him.
* We can do that without fear and with great confidence because God has already given his entire self to us, choosing to belong to us.
* He did this not only on the Cross, but at every single Mass since the Last Supper.
* In Mark’s Gospel, we see that Jesus is establishing himself as a new kind of king for his people.
* In the Old Testament, the people petitioned God to give them a king so they could be like all the other nations rather than except God as their only king.
* God grants their request, but as time goes on, most of Israel’s kings take from their subjects—taxes, labor for building projects, men to serve in the military, and women to be their wives, concubines, and servants.
* Jesus, on the other hand, is not a king who takes, but a king who gives—he pours out his life on the cross for our sins and gives himself to us as food.
* When we are baptized, we are given a share in Christ’s Kingship.
* We are called to reign with Christ by also giving ourselves as a gift to God and to each other.

**Week 12: The Servant of the Lord**

* In this week’s session, we see the Apostles fail Jesus by falling asleep while he suffers in the Garden of Gethsemane and abandoning him as he is taken away to his Death.
* Of all the Gospels, Mark gives the most detailed account of Peter’s threefold denial of Christ.
* Peter flees when Jesus is arrested and then follows him at a distance, eventually denying that he even knows Christ when he is pressed by those around him.
* Do we ever follow Christ at a distance? Have there been times where we, through words, actions, or lack of action, denied Christ because we have not remained close to him?
* Recall that Mark was Peter’s scribe and Mark’s Gospel is Peter’s own firsthand account of Jesus’s life.
* Peter is not afraid to share the dark depths of his denial because he knows that isn’t the end of the story.
* He has such authentic humility that he recalls his weakness knowing that he has since learned to rely solely on Christ, and it is through Christ’s strength that he fulfills his role as our first Pope.
* We should take the same lesson from our first Pope, recognizing that true safety, security, and happiness resides in remaining in the gaze of Christ.
* We can trust that even when we do fall into weakness, we can use it as an opportunity to recognize our need for Christ and resolve to rely on him even more.

**Week 13: Jesus’s Suffering, Death, and Resurrection**

* We saw that all throughout Jesus’s life, he meets with opposition from Jewish leaders and others whose hardness of heart keeps them from understanding who he is.
* Even his Apostles and disciples do not understand fully most of the time.
* Immediately after Jesus’s death, those in Jerusalem begin to see and understand—the Roman centurion encapsulates this sudden change of heart when he proclaims: “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39)
* The graces unleashed to the world through Jesus’s redemptive suffering enabled the people to finally understand.
* It is through Jesus’s cross that all blessings and graces flow even to this day.
* This is why when a priest gives a blessing, he makes the sign of the cross with his hand and why we make the sign of the cross before prayer, when entering the Church with holy water, etc.
* Jesus died to give us the grace to follow after him on the way God calls us to walk.
* As Peter knows and recounts through Mark’s Gospel, the way of the disciple is cruciform—it involves suffering like Jesus.
* But we are not called to go through this suffering by our own strength, but rather by relying on God’s grace, strength, and love for us.

**Week 14: Question and Answer**

* In this week’s session, Dr. Gray expounds on some details in the Gospel of Mark and answers many poignant questions that often confuse us when we read the Bible.
* I encourage you to watch the video if you have not, but today at the conclusion of the study I’d like to touch on the significance of what we’ve just done as a parish family.
* By going through the Gospel of Mark together, we have grown in understanding of our faith and teachings of the Church.
* We have grown closer as a parish family by bonding over shared discussion, questions, and new understandings.
* We have been brought together into intimate relationship with Christ who is the Word by praying with the Scriptures and encountering him in the Eucharist each Sunday.
* I encourage you to continue praying with Scriptures weekly or daily.
* You can begin by praying with the Sunday Mass readings throughout the week, so you are prepared for Mass on Sunday.
* Finally, I’d like to invite you to a dinner here at the parish to celebrate the conclusion of *Lectio: Mark,* to have an opportunity to share our experiences, and pray together.