

Ordinary 2b - Saturday

St. Matthew's Church

20 January 2018

Dear Father Tran and dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

Before commenting on today's very short Gospel, I want to thank you for your hospitality during my pastoral visit to your parish and to tell you how you have impressed me with the prayerfulness of your parish family and the dynamism of your many, many activities in the apostolate. It is inspiring to be with all of you and to witness first-hand what your parish family, under the wise and zealous guidance of your pastor, is accomplishing for the good Lord: a harvest of spiritual gifts and of good works that are building up the Body of Christ.

Now I would like to turn to today's very brief Gospel – the shortest I believe, in all the Lectionary – and offer just a few thoughts on whether Jesus was “out of his mind” (Mk 3:21).

Gospel: The “Crazy” Jesus

Just after Jesus appointed the Twelve (cf. Mk 3:16-19), St. Mark tells us that Jesus returned home only to find yet another crowd assembled and waiting for him.

His family was concerned that he was not exercising sound judgment, and that strangeness would, no doubt they feared, reflect

negatively on them. Today, we might say that they were worried because he didn't seem to be living a healthy, balanced life.

But that kind of life wasn't what he came to preach. Rather, it was the breaking in of the Kingdom of God, of a new way of living, one of absolute trust in the Lord's goodness and providential care. Jesus, by his preaching and his healing was making his family uneasy, so much so that "people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind'" (Mk 3:21). Or, to put it more brutally, they thought he was crazy, even deranged.

From their point of view Jesus should have been back home making tables and chairs instead of attracting crowds of sick and demon-possessed followers and provoking the wrath of the religious leaders of the day. Perhaps their intention was also to protect him; we do not know.¹

What is clear, however, is that Jesus' relatives did not see in him – at least at this point in his ministry – anything other than the ordinary man they had known back home in Nazareth all their lives. The Son of God suffered misunderstanding even from those closest to him: his family and later the disciples he had so patiently schooled in the joy of the Gospel. "Jesus felt, in other words, the depths of incomprehension

¹ Cf. Mary Healy, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2008), 75.

by those closest to him by blood.”² This belongs to his “self-emptying” (cf. Phil 2:6-8).

In this, he manifested the fullness of his humanity, for such not being understood, can also be keenly felt by us. Let’s face it, “faithfulness to the gospel sometimes entails being willing to appear to the world as ‘fools for Christ’.”³

We cannot, of course, entirely blame his relatives for their judgment. Who had ever heard about, yet alone encountered, One who was “just like them” – so they thought! – yet also the divine Son of God? Jesus is both utterly unique as divine and fully human. God among us and with us and for us. Being “out of his mind” seemed the only possible conclusion to explain his behaviour.

As Jesus’ disciples, we are also called to follow in his footsteps. Thus, something of that single-mindedness, mistaken for foolishness by many, should be ours. We have received so much, and yet we can take it for granted. Jesus’ commitment to his mission, his passion for proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom is a lesson for us when we are tempted to be indifferent or, at least, not very enthusiastic about

² Don Talafous, *Homilies for Weekdays: Year II* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 91.

³ Mary Healy, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2008), 75.

bringing the Good News to others.

The world, with all its sorrows and difficulties, might consider us, like our Master “gone out of our mind.” Perhaps what we do, how we think and how we live is regarded as foolishness by the world. But we should not really be disturbed by this. Instead, we should take it as a sign that we are imitating Christ, following in his footsteps.

Conclusion

To be called “crazy” for Christ is not such a bad thing. It is, in fact, something to aspire to.

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