

Maronite Monks of Adoration

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Lent



The Good News for Hard Times

“We must again set out on the way to this real Jesus.” With these words our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI invites us to encounter “this real Jesus” and what better time to do it than the Holy Season of Lent. An excellent way to do this would be to adopt the practice of Lectio Divina or Sacred Reading. A great place to start would be the Gospel according to St. Mark.

Some Preliminaries

How do we know that we encounter “this real Jesus” when we read the Scriptures? Many people have a rather “take it for granted” attitude towards the Bible, assuming that we received it in much the same way one receives a parcel from UPS: just open up the parcel and there you go. In other words, how do we know that the Bible is inspired? “Well the Bible itself tells me that it’s inspired” is just begging the question. So how do we know?

We know because the Church tells us so. Remember, the Church gave us the Bible, not the other way around. Before ascending back to Heaven Our Lord said as His final command, “*Teach ye all nations: baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.*” (Mt. 28:19-20)

Notice that Our Lord gives His Apostles **teaching authority** and commands them to “teach all nations.” He doesn’t tell them to write a book called the Bible, translate it into the different languages, distribute it to all the people and tell them; “Everything you need is all here, so read it and decide for yourselves.” (Sola Scriptura and Private Judgment).

The Apostles teach authoritatively and this oral

teaching becomes known as **Tradition**. From this oral tradition the evangelists will select parts and put it into writing from which comes the Bible. It is this Apostolic authority which the Church possesses that guarantees its inspiration. As St. Augustine said, *“I would not believe the Gospel unless moved thereto by the authority of the Church.”*

It's important to choose a good Bible translation. Probably the best available is the *Revised Standard Version - Catholic Edition Second Version* which is published by Ignatius Press. Do not get the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)* which is more of a political adaptation than a translation. The Holy See has rejected it for both the Divine Liturgy (Lectionary) and the English version of the Universal Catechism.

With your Bible, find a quiet place and devote at least 30 minutes to your reading of Sacred Scripture. Remember, you are not reading for information, but to encounter Our Savior.

The Gospel According to St. Mark

This Gospel is a great place to begin the practice of Sacred Reading and well suited for the Holy Season of Lent. The Church's tradition is that John Mark, a disciple of Simon Peter wrote the Gospel which bears his name. Mark himself was not an eyewitness to the earthy ministry of Our Lord, but based this gospel on the preaching of Simon Peter. You can see the attention to detail that shows the authority of an eyewitness. We are told that Our Lord was asleep in the boat with his head “on a cushion.” Also that he looked on the rich young man “with love.” You certainly have a lot packed into the shortest of the gospels.

This gospel “moves.” The term “and immediately” is used more than 50 times which lends a fast pace to the gospel. Mark wrote this gospel for gentile Christians in Rome and consequently explains Jewish terminology to his readers. Likewise few Old Testament quotes are found here since Romans would be unfamiliar with the Hebrew Scriptures and Mark translates for his audience Aramaic words. Few parables are found here. This is a very straightforward presentation where there is much action.

Reflections

As stated in the title, this gospel is often referred to as *The Good News for Hard Times*. Mark wrote this gospel when the Christians in Rome were undergoing fierce persecution by the Emperor Nero. In their sufferings, the Roman Christians are being reminded that they are following the way of their Lord: the way of the Cross. A striking feature of this gospel is when Our Lord's divinity is recognized. The demons that he expels know his identity, but they are silenced by Our Lord's command. It doesn't happen at one of his miracles. The people are “amazed” and say “we have never seen anything like this.” But this “amazement” doesn't lead to faith. Nor does it take place with Simon Peter's confession of faith because Peter immediately shows that he misunderstands it when he in effect rejects the Cross. *This shall not be!* Our Lord then rebukes him, *“Get behind me Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men.”*

Our Lord's divinity is recognized at the moment of his utter weakness: on the Cross. The Roman centurion, the man in charge of the execution detail, says: *“Truly, this man was the Son of God.”* Just as the centurion recognized Our Lord's divinity in the moment of his most utter weakness, so too we are called to witness the presence of the Divine Son of God in the moments of our weakness. Many times we may feel the absence of God in our lives or feel that he has abandoned us. The Roman Christians must have felt that as they endured Nero's persecution and saw many of their brothers and sisters go to horrible deaths. So Mark reminds them of the horrible death that their Master underwent on the cross. Our Lord's own cry of, *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*, must have resonated with many of them. We must always remember that when we feel most abandoned, God is always there with us. Mark's recounting of Our Lord's Passion can be expressed today in the words of our late Holy Father Pope John Paul II: *“For those who believe in Christ, evil and death do not have the last say.”*

Mark's gospel is also referred to as the “Gospel of failed discipleship.” The Apostles don't come out to well in it. Constantly misunderstanding

Our Lord, you can see his exasperation with them. Then they fail culminating with the denials of Simon Peter and the betrayal of Judas. Yet, Our Lord forgives them and takes them back. He would have forgiven Judas and taken him back if he only came back and said: "Lord, forgive me." Our Lord was no practitioner of "Zero Tolerance." As the Cardinal Archbishop of Santiago Chile once remarked: "If Zero Tolerance was God's way, no one would stand a chance."

Instead, on Easter Sunday when the women go to the tomb of Jesus and find it empty the angel there tells them: "*But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.*" These disciples,

who just failed miserably, are told to go to Galilee. That's where they were called by Jesus and began their discipleship. They now go back to where it all began to begin their discipleship anew.

Many times we have failed in our discipleship and sinned. Yet no matter how horrible our sins may be, Mark's gospel reminds us that the Apostles themselves sinned. Like them, Our Lord calls each one of us during this Lenten season to begin our discipleship again.

May the *Good News for Hard Times* always remind you that Our Lord never abandons you even in your weakest moments and he is always calling you to begin again your discipleship. ✠