

SPIRITUAL LIFE

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Fr. Charles Irvin

The gospel account we've just heard is St. Mark's introduction of Jesus. It has to do with Jesus' identity. St. Mark is asking us: Who is this Jesus? Mark's answer? "The One who has come to bring outcasts back in." He has come for the outcasts, the outsiders. The great irony is that Jesus, the One who came for outcasts, himself had to get out of town. Note that St. Mark reports: "Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but had to stay outside in places where nobody lived."

That's true even today in our culture. It's not politically correct, we are told, to talk about Jesus in public. He has to be kept from where people are living. For instance, at Christmas we're supposed to suppress references to him; we're supposed to dilute the meaning of Christmas down to calling it "The Winter Festival", or just another holiday for gift giving, or another holiday for family get-togethers. We're supposed to submerge Christmas into other reasons for it being a festival celebration. Easter is for bunnies and Halloween is for spooks. At Christmas, keep Jesus out back in the manger; don't allow him into the Inn where everybody else is gathered. The One whom the Father sent for outcasts becomes himself THE outcast.

But, must ask, just who are the outcasts? We, the ones who have been cast out from the Garden of Eden, are the outcasts. We are the ones God the Son has come to heal from the leprosy of sin. What irony it is that we become the ones who cast *him* out, crucified him outside the walls of Jerusalem, and keep him, like a leper, at a safe distance so he can't touch us.

We need to take a close look at the question: Who's "out" and who's "in"? That questions surrounds us each and every day. Teens are terribly concerned with "Who's in and who's not?" They have their own set of outcasts, people they don't want to be seen with in public. And so do adults. And so do families. We all have those with whom we no longer wish to associate, even family members we don't want to have with us in our homes. If you think religion has nothing to do with life, or that the bible has nothing to do with life, then think again.

Today's report from St. Mark speaks directly to us, to our attitudes, and to how we're living with those around us. Is your relationship with Jesus a part of your life or not? Will Jesus be a part of what you think, say and do tomorrow? Or is he out of your life until next Sunday's Mass? Is he "in" or "out" of the village, the community of people among whom you live? "In" or "out" of your daily life?

Try this little test during any regular day of this week. Bring Jesus with you into any conversation. Bring him "in" from being "outside" and then observe the reactions of those around you. I'll bet that in any number of cases he will be *the* leper that

people will want to shun. And if you allow him to touch you, to touch your attitudes, your heart and your ways of thinking...? Well, then, you will have contracted his "leprosy" and folks will begin to shun you. You'll quickly become an "outsider", yourself an outcast.

As for your own private relationship with Jesus, you may want to pay some attention to the part of the gospel you just heard wherein Jesus tells the leper to "go, show yourself to the priest..." As a part of your healing and re-entrance into God's community of believers, present yourself to the priest; it's what your religious tradition tells you to do. It's what Jesus tells us to do when we tainted with the spiritual leprosy of sin. He tells us to go to the priest. So when was the last time you went to confession, revealed your sins and showed the priest your own spiritual leprosy... and then received from him God's healing power in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? If you think that going to confession isn't important, then perhaps you'd better take a long, hard look at what Jesus has to say to us, lepers that we are, and about how we get back into God's family.

And just what is the role that God has assigned for the priest? The answer to that question isn't facile or simple. To return to this homily's beginning, the gospel account we just heard is at the end of St. Mark's first chapter; it concludes Mark's introduction of Jesus. It has several levels to it. One level deals with who Jesus is...his identity. Another level deals with who we are and the condition we're in, namely our own leprosy of sin. Yet another level deals with what will happen to Jesus at the end of his public ministry. For by reporting that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, St. Mark is suggesting that he who came from God to save outcasts, those cast out from the Garden of Eden, will himself become THE outcast, crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem.

The beginning of Mark's gospel hints of its ending. It's the end of the story, however, that's the real clincher. For at the end of St. Mark's gospel accounts we find Jesus, as Mary Magdalene did, in another Garden, the garden of the resurrection. With Mary Magdalene and her companions we find ourselves healed, outcasts no longer, able to walk this earth the glorious freedom of the sons and daughters to God, redeemed sinners, a people healed of sin's leprosy, victims and outcasts no longer.

So the next time you find yourself talking about who's "in" and who's "out" maybe it would be a good thing to think about who Jesus considers to be "in" and who is "on the outs" with him. For when it comes to God's attitude, the only ones who are outcasts are the ones who have made themselves so. When we cast God out of our lives we ourselves become the outcasts.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Leviticus 13:1-2, 45-46 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 Mark 1:40-45

February 15, 2015

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張 春 申 神 父

本主日的福音幫助我們認識清楚一些耶穌基督宣講的天國，究竟具有怎樣的性質；究竟是怎樣的。猶太人自從充軍返回祖國之後，熱烈期待天國來臨，也就是希望天主按照先知許諾的，末了來到猶太民族中與他們長相左右、永不分離。這便是天主開始永恆的統治。但是天主這樣來臨，究竟給予猶太人怎樣的恩惠呢？究竟怎樣解救猶太人呢？耶穌時代，猶太人中也有好多不同的想法。恐怕最流行的想法是：天國來臨便是天主先遣發祂的代表默西亞來消滅一切猶太民族政治上的仇人，使他們恢復達味時代的榮耀，直到永遠。所以天國臨近為當時的群眾以及領袖是屬猶太政治上的勝利。

不過，耶穌自己肯定的天國有這種政治意味嗎？只要分析一下本主日的福音，已經可以有些捉摸了。

耶穌不但以言語行動宣講天國，而且也以自己的態度表示天主來到人間，統治一切的態度。當耶穌看見一個癩病人便動了憐憫的心。這啓示我們天國來臨人間，不是導致人類鬥爭殺戮，而是令人先經驗到天主的憐憫；然後如同路加福音中說的：你們應當慈悲，就像你們的父那樣慈悲。耶穌動了憐憫的心，這是藉著自己的態度，向人說明天國來臨是一個憐憫人的天主來與人長相左右，也因此要求一切人彼此憐憫。

耶穌動了憐憫的心，就撫摸了癩病人使他潔淨。在猶太人中，恐怕患有癩病的人是最慘的了。首先人們都認為這種病是天主的懲罰；因而法律命令癩病人與人群隔離，好像已經從自己的團體中開除出去了。本主日福音中那個癩病人冒了受法律制裁的危險，走近耶穌。而在耶穌的奇跡中，我們又更認識一些祂所宣講的天國的意義。來臨的不是一個嚴厲罰人的天主，而是一個把被排斥在團體之外的人，融合到團體之內去的天主。總之，天國來臨，促使大家共融，團結在一起。

最後，為什麼耶穌嚴厲警告潔淨了的人，不要告訴別人呢？原來，猶太人渴望自己的民族自羅馬人的壓迫下解救出來，期待一位使他們在世界政治舞台上重新抬頭的默西亞降來。假使有人把耶穌的奇跡竭力囂張，極可能大家蜂擁前來，擁戴祂出來向羅馬人挑戰。耶穌自己深知天國不是政治性的，所以祂預先如此警告。

事實上，當那人開始宣揚奇跡，耶穌非但不想趁機製造政治活動，相反，只留在荒野，不再公開進城。

耶穌宣講的天國，不是三言兩語可以完全說明的。不過，在今天的福音中，我們至少認識了一些相當重要意義。天國臨近便是天主的仁慈憐憫、合一團結的力量進入人間。這是在耶穌的宣講與奇跡中，顯現出來的救恩。可見這不是政治性的鬥爭對抗，而是宗教性的平安和諧。

基督信徒相信天主的國已經在耶穌的工程中實現人間，那麼由於我們信從了這個喜訊，必須在自己生命中，一方面感謝天主的仁慈恩祐，召叫自己在合一的教會團體中；另一方面，信仰推動我們憐憫遭難的人，也努力在人群中製造團結。

摘自「妙音送長風」

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二 零 一 五 年 二 月 十 五 日

肋:13:1-2,45-46; 格前 10:31-11:1; 谷 1:40-45