

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**Many people have told me that they'd like to read the Bible, but they don't know where to begin. I always recommend that they begin with the Gospel of St. Mark. Mark doesn't approach his message theologically. He doesn't seem to draw on the stories others have told him. St. Mark simply reports what he has seen and heard. There is no genealogy in Mark's Gospel. He doesn't concern himself with the birth and early life of Jesus. No, St. Mark's Gospel is a straight-forward account of what he had seen and heard. He concerns himself with the works, the words, and the ministry of Christ. Of all the Gospels, St. Mark puts you in touch with the person of Jesus, beginning with his baptism by John, followed by the Spirit driving him into the desert to be tested by the devil.**

**In Mark's telling, Jesus comes roaring out of the desert to Galilee where he proclaims that "the kingdom of God is at hand". He calls his first disciples and immediately begins his ministry—healing the sick, calling out demons, cleansing the leper, raising the paralytic, proclaiming God's mercy, forgiveness, and love. Crowds gathered around to hear him and seek his healing touch.**

**Then, in this 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, Mark tells us Jesus "came home. Again the crowd gathered, making it impossible for them even to eat." Next he tells us one of the most remarkable things you'll ever read in the Scriptures. He says, "When his relatives heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind'".**

**What was he thinking? If you're writing a Gospel trying to convince people that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, why in the world would you include the notion that, at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus' own family thought he was nuts?**

**After all, Matthew and Luke never mention this. St. John does allude to something of a family feud in his Gospel, saying, "For even his own brothers did not believe in him." That's a lot nicer than saying that his family thought he was nuts.**

**Then Mark goes on, saying that scribes sent by the high priest from Jerusalem, proclaimed, "He is possessed by Beelzebub", and "By the prince of demons he drives out demons".**

**What a way to begin a ministry! What a way to begin a Gospel! Why does St. Mark begin his Gospel telling us this?**

**First of all, I believe Mark mentions the incident because it really happened. This "home-coming event" gives authenticity to the entire Scripture. It is a solid fact of what happened in the life of Jesus. Unlike what we are experiencing today when today's "fact" unravels with tomorrow's revelation of a different set of "facts", this event speaks of the truth of the Gospel.**

A second thought that we might take from this event in the life of Jesus is that his family was just as dysfunctional as ours. Obviously, they didn't all agree. Jesus had become an embarrassment to them. They came out "to seize him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind'".

The dysfunction within families is something of a recurring theme throughout the Bible. Think of the stories that grace its pages—Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers; the troubled marriages of Abraham and Sarah, Hosea and Gomer, David and Bathsheba, along with his many other wives. And let's not forget the one we call the Holy Family. If, in speaking of Jesus' brothers and sisters, they apparently came along with Joseph, and Jesus was born into a "blended family", that apparently didn't always see eye-to-eye.

Can you imagine what pain that had to cause Jesus? Perhaps that's why he says later, when told that his Mother and brothers and sisters were trying to see him, he replies, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

This was, it seems, an admonition to his family, but not a rejection of them. Rather he enlarges the sense of family to include all who seek to do the will of God, giving rise to the notion of the Family of God.

We see here at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus' first experience of rejection. He is rejected by his family and the religious leaders. They claim he's crazy, and even worse, possessed by a demon. It had to be with a heavy heart that he went back to work, proclaiming in parables the presence of the Kingdom of God and manifesting it in healing the sick, only to come again to rejection in Nazareth some time later, where they tried to kill him by throwing him off a cliff. And, of course, his ultimate rejection on Calvary.

As we reflect on the rejections Jesus suffered from his own family and religious leaders, those of us who have experienced rejection from loved ones might take comfort in knowing that we are not alone. It might also help us to read on in St. Mark's Gospel how Jesus did not allow those rejections to deter him from his mission. Nor did those rejections cause bitterness and anger and hurt and fear to control his life. He continued his mission of mercy, proclaiming the already-forgiving-love of God for all people until all that rejection was ultimately redeemed and overcome with the empty tomb of Easter morning.

**This is so important for us to consider today. There is no greater human fear than to be rejected. We all want to be loved. We all want to be accepted. We all want to be appreciated. And sometimes out of fear of rejection, we compromise our principles; we put on a phony mask, pretending to be someone we're not; we give up on our ideals; and sometimes we even give up on ourselves.**

**This past week two prominent people have tragically taken their own lives. Kate Spade about whom I know little, other than she was very successful in the world of fashion, and Anthony Bourdain, the celebrity chef who introduced us to exotic foods and places and people. While they were famous, apparently there are a whole lot of lesser known people who have given up on life, given up on themselves.**

**We're told that suicide in this county has increased by 25% since 1999. More young people between 18 and 25 die by suicide than by drug addiction, sickness and disease, or auto accidents. Suicide has reached epidemic proportions in our country. Why?**

**I don't have all the answers, but I suspect one is the fear of rejection, the feeling of not being loved, appreciated, cherished for the person I am.**

**I am here to tell you today that Fear, He is a liar. There is a wonderful new song by that name that just came out at the end of February by Zach Williams that tells us:**

**Fear! He is a liar. When he told you you're not good enough;**

**When he told you you're not right; when he told you you're not strong enough to put up a good fight; when he told you you're not worthy; when he told you you're not loved; when he told you you're not beautiful; that you'll never be enough. Fear! He is a liar.**

**He will take your breath; stop you in your steps. Fear! He is a liar. He will rob your rest; steal your happiness.**

**Cast your fear in the fire, 'cause fear, he is a liar.**

**When he told you you were troubled, you'll forever be alone.**

**When he told you you should run away, you'll never find a home.**

**When he told you you were dirty and you should be ashamed.**

**When he told you you could be the one that grace could never change. Fear! He is a liar. He will take your breath, stop you in your steps. Fear. He is a liar. He will rob your rest. Steal your happiness.**

**Cast your fear in the fire, 'cause fear, he is a liar**

**Let your fire fall and cast out all my fears;**

**Let your fire fall. Your love is all I feel.**

**Let your fire fall and cast out all my fears;**

**Let your fire fall. Your love is all I feel.**

**Let your fire fall and cast out all my fears.**

**Let your fire fall. Your love is all I feel.**

**Oh, let your fire fall and cast out all my fears.**

**Let your fire fall. Your love is all I feel.**

**Oh, fear, he is a liar. He will take your breath, stop you in your steps. Fear he is a liar. He will rob your rest, steal your happiness. Cast your fear in the fire, 'cause fear he is a liar, 'cause fear, he is a liar.**

**The young composer, Zach Williams, is telling us fear of rejection is the lyin' devil seeking to destroy us and tells us to call on the Holy Spirit to allow His fire to fall, casting out that devil, Fear, so that we can trust, depend on, and experience the never-ending, always forgiving, ever-accepting and welcoming love of the God who will never, ever, ever reject us. FEAR! HE IS A LIAR!**