

3rd Sunday of the Year B January 22, 2012 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

Some years ago I went to a production at Playhouse in the Park in Cincinnati. It was a one man performance, I forget his name, of the reading of the gospel of Mark. It does not sound very exciting, but it was fascinating to hear one man, with one prop, a table and a chair, recite every word of that gospel. Mark's whole gospel can be read in an hour and a half, all sixteen chapters. And when you read it all at once, it makes more sense. Mark constantly uses the words "and then" and "immediately." Doing it this way, you get a very clear picture of who Jesus was, at least in the eyes of Mark.

This year we will be reading from Mark's gospel almost every Sunday, except during some of the Sundays of Lent and Easter. Each gospel paints a different picture of Jesus. Matthew paints Jesus as the great teacher, the new Moses, and he includes many of the sayings and teachings of the Lord. Luke paints Jesus as the compassionate one who reaches out to so many, especially the outcasts and the poor. He is the prayerful one. John portrays Jesus as the divine Son of God, the all powerful one who is in control of the situation. But Mark paints Jesus as the human man with feeling, the man of action more than the teacher, he is the healer who confronts human pain and the power of evil at every turn. But perhaps most of all he is the suffering Messiah. Some have said that Mark's gospel is a Passion Narrative with a long introduction.

There are other things that are helpful to know about Mark's gospel. It was the first gospel written, and the other ones, especially Matthew and Luke, depend very much on it. Jesus is pictured as very human, we see him with his emotions, getting angry at times, being very disappointed at times, being very compassionate to others. The disciples are his closest friends, but they are also shown with all their faults and they are very slow to understand.

It is important to know when and for whom the gospel was written. It was written between the years of 60 and 70, probably right before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. It was probably written for primarily Gentile Christians living in the city of Rome, who were suffering great persecutions. It tells them of the cost of discipleship, it tells them how Jesus suffered, but it also gives them hope, that even in the midst of suffering, Jesus will be with them. Jesus suffered, and his disciples had to suffer, and so will we, but we will survive, as he did, because he is with us.

How appropriate that we read Mark's gospel this year, in fact any year, for suffering is part of our lives. How many of us have experienced some illness this year, personal illness or illness of a loved one. Does a year go by when we do not experience the death of a family member or loved one. Some of us still experience financial hardships or at least insecurities. In this gospel Jesus is telling us that he too experienced suffering, he gives us hope, he tells us that he is always here with us.

Our readings today tell us that "now" is the time. In our first reading, Jonah told the people of Nineveh that they had 40 days to repent, and they immediately did so. Paul tells the Corinthians that the time is running out. And in the gospel the four fishermen were called to leave their boats and follow Jesus, and they immediately did so. The Lord also calls us to follow him, to be his disciple. Do we make excuses, do we procrastinate? "Now" is the time.

Today is the Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. We have many people in our parish, from local parishes and from Alter High School boarding buses for the long trip to Washington D.C. for the peaceful and prayerful march for life that will occur tomorrow. They are answering our Lord's call to discipleship. On this Sunday we remember at our mass the millions of unborn children who have been aborted since Roe versus Wade decision in 1973. During this coming Lenten season we will participate in the Bottles for Babies program with Elizabeth New Life Center. How else are we called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?