

## Mark 1:29-39

In Mark's Gospel, the first recorded hours of Jesus' ministry are a whirlwind of activity. We are meant to see that Jesus is a man of action. There were very strict rules concerning the Sabbath. The Jews were not to do any work. The Sabbath was reserved for God and was intended to be a day of rest. The only work the Jews were permitted to do was to walk to the synagogue and return home. Therefore, each town had its own synagogue. Depending on how fast you walked, the synagogue in Capernaum was about two-to-three-minutes from Simon's house. Jesus just came from the synagogue where He taught with authority and drove out a demon from a man who was possessed. He walks over to Simon's house, where He is immediately told that Simon's mother-in-law is sick with a fever.

We get the impression that a fever was different from an exorcism because Mark is careful to differentiate the two. There is no doubt that the Simon's mother-in-law was ill, but perhaps not as serious as someone who is possessed by a demon; but make no mistake, the woman is ill and unable to function. Jesus knew the Law but always put compassion before the Law. One point is clear, when Jesus enters human lives, things change fast and always for the better for those who are open to Him. Jesus went over to her, took her by the hand, and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. It sounds strange to hear that the first thing Simon's mother-in-law does is to get up and serve. To understand this, we have to know the culture. Serving guests was customary. The women of the house would prepare food and refreshments for any guests that came to visit. Their culture is a culture of welcome, but there is more depth to her just being a hostess. When Simon's mother-in-law is cured, she does what Jesus Himself does; she serves those in need. She becomes a disciple.

Our Gospel tells us that news quickly spread, and after the Sabbath was over, people came from all over. The whole town gathered at Simon's door. This must have been a magnificent, if not chaotic, scene. I have been to Simon Peter's house, and I can attest to the fact that it is a very small house. People who were ill, demon-possessed, or sick with various diseases were brought to Jesus at that little house.

I think Mark was determined to convey a particular message: Jesus is for everyone. He is there for the day-to-day routines and challenges of life, and He is there for the significant events, the major trials, and tribulations we all face. Although Mark tells us about these dramatic events in the life of Jesus' ministry, I think he is challenging us to examine our

lives. He wants us to realize that we can bring all our challenges to Jesus, and that prompts many questions:

Are there things going on in our lives that we need to bring to Jesus? When we feel powerless in our world of chaos and confusion, are we bound by something that we need Jesus to deliver us from or are we just spectators in the crowd at Simon's door? Are we fighting to get close to the Lord? Christ's presence brings wholeness. Do we need that? People with open hearts and minds become rejuvenated in His presence. Do we need that? Have we become complacent and stale in our faith? One touch from Jesus and Simon's mother-in-law gets the energy to serve. Do we need that touch?

This Gospel challenges us. Who do we take our troubles to? Jesus addresses the demons, and they leave. He hears Simon's concern about his mother-in-law and immediately brings healing and comfort. Crowds form at the door, and Jesus is there for every one of them. There are no troubles or challenges Jesus will not face with us and for us. He just asks one thing. He asks that we have the faith of a tiny mustard seed. Jesus became human for us, and He understands the human condition! He brought joy to a family at Cana. He brought healing and hope to Simon's mother-in-law, to the paralyzed, and to the blind. He gave bread to the hungry and, in the end, from the cross, He gave us His mother and then gave us His very life. He gave us everything,

Yet this Gospel of Mark tells us something else about Jesus. He not only gives of Himself, but Jesus also has needs. He needed time to Himself...time to talk to the Father...time to pray. People came to Him with their needs, and He fulfilled their expectations beyond what they could ever imagine, but where did He get His reinforcement?

Very early in the morning, Jesus steals away in the dark to speak, to converse, to open His heart and mind to the Father; to build strength for the work of the coming day. And work it will be. In his book titled "Prayer," theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar tells us that, "Prayer is a conversation between God and the soul. Prayer is dialogue, not a monologue before God." That is what Jesus needed. That is how He built His strength for another day. Mark tells us that everyone was hunting for Jesus and when Simon and his fellow hunters found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for you." Jesus didn't let out a big sigh and say, "Oh, alright, let's go." No... with great urgency, He says, "Let's go to the neighboring towns so I can proclaim the message because that is what I came to do." Fortified by prayer, Jesus was energized. He was refreshed, rejuvenated and up to the task of taking on the world and its challenges.

The miracles of Jesus are one side of the story in today's Gospel. The power of prayer is the rest of the story. God's word is His invitation to us to be with Him, to bring Him into our lives. Like the people in Mark's Gospel, we too are in danger of drowning on the open sea of trials and troubles, but God's word, time spent sitting in the quiet presence of God, is the rope ladder thrown down to us so that we can climb up into the arms of His compassion. It is the red carpet, rolled out toward us so that we can walk along it to the Father's throne. God's word is the lantern that shines in the darkness of the world. Finally, as our theologian von Balthasar tells us, "God's word is Himself, His most vital, innermost self. His only-begotten Son, His only Son of the same nature as Himself, His only Son was sent into the world to bring it home, bring it back to the Father." And so, just as God spoke to His Son, He speaks to us from heaven and commends us to Jesus, His Word dwelling on earth for a while: "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him." Follow His example.

It is not enough to view the dialogues and encounters presented in the Gospel as mere "stories." We are challenged to explore deeper to find the message that wants to attach itself to our hearts. Jesus is concerned with every particular occasion in our lives. In addressing the repentant sinner, He addresses every sinner. In speaking to Mary, listening at His feet, He speaks to every listener. In inviting the thief on the cross to join Him in paradise, Jesus extends the same invitation to all of us. It is impossible to listen to any individual word of God without hearing the Son who *is* the Word of God. The Son whose heart breaks when ours breaks, the Son who cries with us when we cry, the Son who rejoices when we rejoice. The Son who said everyone that sees and believes in Him would have eternal life. Jesus, the Son who heals mind, body, and soul.