

10th Sunday in OT + 9 June 2024 + Gen 3 + 2 Cor 4 + Mk 3

This past week, we marked the 80th anniversary of the D-day landings in Normandy, France: the greatest armada ever gathered for a total offense against a firmly-entrenched enemy. For nearly 5 years, continental Europe had been under the grip of Nazi oppression, so the men who stormed those beaches were seen as saviors to millions who longed for freedom. But a lot of groundwork was required before the Allies could even attempt the landings: neutralizing the Nazi u-boats and air power, and even elaborate schemes to mask the location and size of the D-day landings. The few remaining servicemen who managed to survive D-day are now pushing 100 years old, and when they go, the world will lose a precious link to a moment when the free world seemed to hang in the balance.

I mention this because in our 1st reading today, we hear about another time in human history in which the direction of the world hung in balance: in the Garden of Eden. Satan, under the guise of a serpent, had tricked Adam and Eve into the greatest of lies: essentially, that *God* was the evil one, limiting their freedom, and that *he* (satan) was the one to set them free. And they fell for it. And mankind has been under slavery to sin ever since. Human nature is so wounded by this primordial lie, that we are ultimately powerless to do anything about it by ourselves. And so God brought in His biggest gun to take out the enemy; the only one who could *strike the head* of the ancient serpent: His Son. And it would cost Him dearly: the enemy would *strike His heel* on the Cross.

And this is where our Gospel picks up today. Prior to this episode in Mark's Gospel, Jesus has been healing the sick and casting out demons. In other words, He has been undoing the wounds of original sin: body-sickness, and soul-sickness. Jesus is laying the groundwork for his ultimate take-down of the devil. And the people aren't sure what to make of it all. They have become so used to the status quo, that even though He has performed miracles among them, they still don't believe. Even His relatives think He is out of His mind.

But it gets even worse. The scribes are sent from Jerusalem as the official representatives of the religious leaders to level a most serious charge against Jesus: *By the prince of demons he drives out demons*. Now in our hyper-political world, we are used to opponents leveling such over-the-top charges against each other. But this is different. This is blasphemy; and is so serious that it can lead to an unforgiveable sin. More on that in a moment.

So first, Jesus tries to reason with them (something which is sadly often missing in our political discourse these days too!): *How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand*. If America was as divided in 1944 as it seems to be today, WW2 would have very likely had a very different result. Jesus then takes His rebuke of the scribes to the next level: *Amen, I say to you, all sins and all blasphemies that people utter will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never*

have forgiveness, but is guilty of an everlasting sin. Now, we might be thinking, “doesn’t God forgive any and every sin?” And the answer is yes, sort of. There is no sin that God is unwilling to forgive from a humble and contrite heart. But His mercy is bound, so to speak, by a human heart that refuses to repent and believe in Him. To call Jesus an agent of satan is to call God a liar, which is the worst of sins. This blasphemy is equivalent to the original charge by satan against God in the Garden of Eden: that He is a liar and He can’t be trusted. It is to mimic satan, and if someone obstinately chooses to remain in this mindset, it can become a choice for the same fate as satan of eternal damnation.

Our Gospel then makes a turn that at first glance doesn’t seem to fit the arc of the story. As an aside here, the ancient belief of the Church is that Mary remained ever-virgin after the birth of Christ, and so *brothers and sisters* here most likely refers to close relatives of Jesus. Neither Hebrew nor Aramaic has a word for “cousin,” and the Greek word translated as *brother* here is much broader than just blood-siblings. At any rate, Jesus shocks His audience: He explains that even blood bonds are of less importance than the relationship established by discipleship: *whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother*

This new family of God based on union with His will, which foreshadows the Church, is like a counter example of those who are guilty of an everlasting sin. I think of here the beautiful old Perpetual Help Devotion that prays: *I will what God wills, when He wills it, as He wills it, because He wills it.* When one reaches this unity of heart and mind with God, they already have one foot in heaven even as they continue to live on earth. As the Poet Dante wrote, *in His will is our peace*, and there is no greater peace than being in the center of God’s will.

But to be united to the heart and mind of God presupposes that you know what it is, and therefore requires 3 things that our fallen human natures don’t typically gravitate towards: much prayer, study, and exercise. Prayer: talking to Him, asking Him His will, and doing our best just to sit and wait upon His voice. Study: reading Scripture, listening to podcasts, taking advantage of formation opportunities here at the parish. And exercise, meaning, trying to live it out! Especially when it is hard: such as when a child chooses the family of God over a natural family, or a significant loss of health or work or even a loved one. And holding on to hope that He can bring good out of even what seems to be the darkest night.

Or, as St. Paul writes so beautifully to the Corinthians in our 2nd reading: *Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal. For we know that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in heaven.*