

THE USE AND ABUSE OF JESUS' NAME

(MARK 9:38-43, 45, 47-48)



There is a certain irony in John's complaining to Jesus about the unauthorised exorcist who has been using Jesus' name – and therefore Jesus' power – to help people by casting out evil spirits.

Mark has related not long before this episode the incident where the father of an epileptic boy asks Jesus to cast out the spirit of dumbness from his son after Jesus' disciples proved unable to do so. Jesus reacts with frustration, saying, "You faithless generation... how long must I put up with you?" In his reply to John, Jesus makes it clear that his power is not limited to the circle of his disciples. There is even a hint that John is not quite clear about where this authority lies, as he actually says that the person in question does not follow us, rather than does not follow you.

This wider vision extends to people who show kindness to disciples who bear the name of Jesus.

The final paragraph is an example of the exaggerated speech which is characteristic of some Middle Eastern societies. The idea of self-mutilation as a remedy for sin is not to be taken in any way literally, but the language serves to underline the seriousness of attending to our moral Christian discipleship, not just for our own sake, but because it can undermine other people's following of Jesus. ■

REFLECT

Reading the signs of the times is a useful theme for today's Gospel reflection. In these ecumenical days, we are more appreciative of the sincerity and values of other Christian bodies and of other religions: much of this progress comes from simply interacting with such people, getting to know them as individuals and seeing what we have in common, rather than what might divide us. Jesus' words about the exorcist acting without official permission are a warning to those who would restrict Jesus' influence to any privileged group.

The section on giving scandal is one which is of particular relevance, given the appalling revelations which have rocked the Church in recent years. It is clear that many people who have survived abuse have, understandably, lost their faith in God, Jesus and the Church, which is supposed to be "the sacrament of Christ's presence in the world". Those affected are not only those directly involved, but also those who are so bewildered or disgusted at this abuse of trust that they have abandoned the practice of the faith, if not their faith altogether.

We might remember that the Church is the whole people of God, not just the leaders. When the institution becomes more important than its reason for existing, then something has gone seriously wrong. Perhaps John's complaint about the unauthorised exorcist might be a warning today about thinking that the Spirit can be limited (or contained) within the structures of the Church: Jesus' teaching on dealing with the causes of scandal would go a long way to preventing future disasters. ■



SAY

"...nor can she be captured, silenced or restrained."

(John L. Bell and Graham Maule – on the Holy Spirit)

LEARN

The expression "little ones" is Mark's way of referring to people of simple faith.

People in the Middle Eastern society of Jesus' day often used exaggeration or hyperbole to emphasise the serious nature of what they were talking about.

The "donkey's millstone", which is what the text actually says, is the upper stone which the donkey would turn by walking around: it would be heavy enough to ensure death by drowning.

DO

Make sure that you are familiar with your parish's safeguarding policy and requirements.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

All that you have done to us, O Lord,
you have done with true judgement,
for we have sinned against you
and not obeyed your commandments.
But give glory to your name
and deal with us according to the bounty of
your mercy.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,

we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

O God, who manifest your almighty power
above all by pardoning and showing mercy,
bestow, we pray, your grace abundantly upon
us
and make those hastening to attain your
promises
heirs to the treasures of heaven.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Numbers 11:25-29

A reading from the book of Numbers.

The Lord came down in the Cloud. He spoke
with Moses, but took some of the spirit
that was on him and put it on the seventy
elders. When the spirit came on them they
prophesied, but not again.

Two men had stayed back in the camp;
one was called Eldad and the other Medad.
The spirit came down on them; though they
had not gone to the Tent, their names were
enrolled among the rest. These began to
prophesy in the camp. The young man ran
to tell this to Moses, "Look," he said, "Eldad
and Medad are prophesying in the camp."
Then said Joshua the son of Nun, who had
served Moses from his youth, "My Lord
Moses, stop them!" Moses answered him,
"Are you jealous on my account? If only the
whole people of the Lord were prophets, and
the Lord gave his Spirit to them all!"

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 18

Response:

The precepts of the Lord gladden the heart.

1. The law of the Lord is perfect,
it revives the soul.
The rule of the Lord is to be trusted,
it gives wisdom to the simple. (R.)
2. The fear of the Lord is holy,
abiding for ever.
The decrees of the Lord are truth
and all of them just. (R.)
3. So in them your servant finds instruction;
great reward is in their keeping.
But who can detect all his errors?
From hidden faults acquit me. (R.)
4. From presumption restrain your servant
and let it not rule me.
Then shall I be blameless,
clean from grave sin. (R.)

SECOND READING James 5:1-6

A reading from the letter of St James.

An answer for the rich. Start crying, weep
for the miseries that are coming to you. Your
wealth is all rotting, your clothes are all eaten
up by moths. All your gold and your silver
are corroding away, and the same corrosion
will be your own sentence, and eat into your
body. It was a burning fire that you stored up
as your treasure for the last days. Labourers
mowed your fields and you cheated them –
listen to the wages that you kept back, calling
out; realise that the cries of the reapers have
reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. On
earth you have had a life of comfort and
luxury; in the time of slaughter you went on
eating to your heart's content. It was you who
condemned the innocent and killed them;
they offered you no resistance.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
Your word is truth, O Lord,
consecrate us in the truth.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Mark 9:38-43. 45. 47-48

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Mark.

John said to Jesus, "Master, we saw a man
who is not one of us casting out devils in
your name; and because he was not one
of us we tried to stop him." But Jesus said,
"You must not stop him: no one who works
a miracle in my name is likely to speak evil of
me. Anyone who is not against us is for us."
"If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink
just because you belong to Christ, then I tell
you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose
his reward.

"But anyone who is an obstacle to bring
down one of these little ones who have faith,
would be better thrown into the sea with a
great millstone round his neck. And if your
hand should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is
better for you to enter into life crippled, than
to have two hands and go to hell, into the
fire that cannot be put out. And if your foot
should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is better
for you to enter into life lame, than to have

two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your
eye should cause you to sin, tear it out; it is
better for you to enter into the kingdom of
God with one eye, than to have two eyes and
be thrown into hell where their worm does
not die nor their fire go out."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Grant us, O merciful God,
that this our offering may find acceptance
with you
and that through it the wellspring of all
blessing
may be laid open before us.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Remember your word to your servant,
O Lord,
by which you have given me hope.
This is my comfort when I am brought low.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

May this heavenly mystery, O Lord,
restore us in mind and body,
that we may be coheirs in glory with Christ,
to whose suffering we are united
whenever we proclaim his Death.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.