

FOLLOW ME

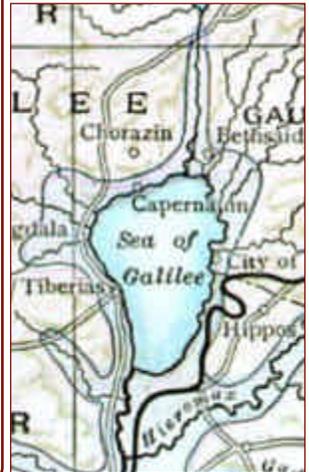
LESSON THREE: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 1:21-45



FAST FACTS

- Jesus preached in the city of Capernaum, one of the economic centers of the Galilee.
- The first person healed by Jesus was possessed by a demon.
- The demon acknowledged that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He has authority over demons.
- Jesus healed the mother-in-law of St. Peter from an illness that had left her sick in bed.
- Jesus went off in the early morning to pray by Himself.
- Jesus came to preach the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus healed a leper, and in doing so demonstrated His compassion for the sick and suffering.

MAP



MARK 1:21-34

This passage begins with Jesus preaching in the city of Capernaum, which was the capital of the Galilee and a customs post on the road between Egypt and Damascus. Jesus' preaching in the synagogue in Capernaum wasn't like anything the people had ever heard. All the teachers they heard were given their authority as teachers by a specific rabbi, and they taught only the teachings and biblical interpretations approved by that rabbi. Jesus, however, received his authority directly from God the Father (see John 12:44-50), and, as the Truth Himself (John 14:6), His teaching about truth was more powerful than that of any person.

Jesus particularly amazed the people with His authority when He expelled a demon from a person, because even the rabbis were not believed to have such authority. This authority is confirmed by the demon itself, which acknowledged that Jesus has the power to



OUR FAITH TEACHES...

It is common today to deny the existence of Satan and his demons; the image of the devil as a cartoonish red figure with horns, a pointed tail, and pitchfork feeds our doubts about personal evil beings.

Holy Scripture and the Tradition of the Church absolutely affirm the existence of demons. The Apostle Paul calls demons "principalities...powers...[and] the rulers of the darkness of this age" (Ephesians 6:12), while Satan is "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (2:2). Fr. Thomas concisely describes the biblical depiction of Satan and the demons: "[Satan] has 'fallen from heaven' together with his evil angels to do battle with God and his servants (Luke 10:18; Isaiah 14:12)."

These evil spirits particularly hate Christians whose lives are fully dedicated to serving and pleasing God. St. Maximos the Confessor warns: "The demons that wage war on us through our shortcomings in virtue are those that teach unchastity, drunkenness, avarice and envy. Those that wage war on us through our excessive zeal for virtue teach conceit, self-esteem and pride; they secretly pervert what is commendable into what is reprehensible."

At the same time, we do not need to be terrified by evil spirits. We should always remember the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem: "A mighty ally and protector, therefore, have we from God; a great Teacher of the Church, a mighty Champion on our behalf. Let us not be afraid of the demons, nor of the devil; for mightier is He who fights for us."

destroy demons because He is the Son of God (see also Matthew 8:16). Venerable Bede, a British saint of the 7th-8th centuries, tells us, "It was appropriate, since death first entered into the world through the devil's envy (see Genesis 3:16), that the healing medicine of salvation should first operate against him." In other words, it is appropriate that the first miracle performed by Jesus that St. Mark tells us about is expelling a demon, because our need to be saved by Jesus began with a work by Satan.

Blessed Theophylact points out something very important about the miracle in which Jesus healed St. Peter's mother-in-law: after the woman was healed, she immediately began to serve the visitors in her home. He writes, "This account makes clear that if you, O reader, are suffering from an illness and God heals you, make use of your health to minister to the saints and to serve God." God doesn't heal us — or, for that matter, do anything else with us — simply so that we will be happier and feel better. Instead, He heals us to make us complete persons, and complete persons are always in relationship with, and concerned with the needs of, other people. In fact, this emphasis on relationship is why the Orthodox Church has the Mystery (or Sacrament) of Unction, in which a sick person is anointed with the oil of chrism: we are all the Body of Christ, and thus the whole Body suffers when one member is sick — God's healing is intended to make the *whole Body of Christ* well, and not just the sick person.

MARK 1:35-45

Jesus began His day with prayer. The morning service of the Church, Matins, is celebrated in monasteries at about the same time at which it is believed Jesus is praying in this passage: 3:00 AM. Jesus' actions in this passage tell us a great deal about how we are supposed to pray, as well as live our lives built upon prayer. First, Jesus rose early and went away from where others might be: we should pray at times and in places where we will not be distracted while we pray. Second, He prayed before He engaged in His ministry for the day: we should always pray before we do things, because our help and strength comes from God (see Psalm 28:7; Philippians 4:13).

Notice Jesus words in verse 38: "That is why I came out." St. Luke expands on Jesus' statement and includes, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43). The focus of Jesus' ministry throughout Judea was not to perform miracles, but to teach the people about the Kingdom of God.

Lepers were declared unclean by the Mosaic law. Leviticus 13-14 contains detailed instructions regarding how lepers were to be treated: they were examined by a priest and, if the priest determined the individual had leprosy, he or she had to live away from other people. Those who were healed of leprosy also had to undergo an extensive ceremony to pronounce them religiously clean. This is why Jesus ordered the man to have the priests look at him.

LOOK AT YOURSELF

The best way to engage in a life of prayerful communion with God is to establish a *Rule of Prayer*:

- Pray in the same place everyday (preferably in an icon corner in your home).
- Prepare yourself to pray by forgiving everyone against whom you have a grudge.
- Clear your mind of all thoughts that distract you from God.
- Say some of the prayers in a prayer book.
- Include in your prayers the four things recommended by St. Basil the Great: glorify God; thank Him for everything He has done for you; confess your sins to Him; ask Him for things you need.

LOOK AT YOURSELF

Jesus healed the leper not to "prove Himself" in some way, or to win followers, but simply because He was filled with compassion for the leper. Leprosy is a particularly disgusting disease, with the victim's body literally rotting away. Jesus saw through this, however, and saw a person who was made in the image of God.

We need to ask ourselves: Do we avoid people because of the way they look, or their social status, or problems they have? God calls us to love and serve *everyone*, just as He does. We should make an effort to be friends with those who do not have friends, and to help everyone who needs our help.

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

- What does the authority displayed by Jesus mean for the Church, and for me?
- What are some ways in which I can develop my prayer life

to be more like that in which Jesus engaged?

- St. Mark depicts Jesus helping people suffering from three different problems. What does this tell me about Jesus' character, and how can I be more like Him in my life?

