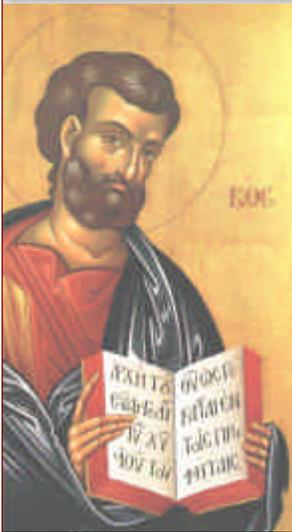


FOLLOW ME

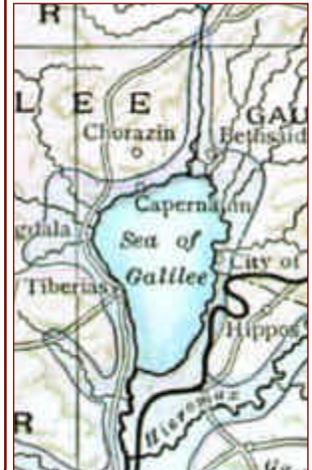
LESSON FOUR: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 2



FAST FACTS

- Jesus healed a paralyzed man who was lowered through the roof of the house where He was staying.
- Jesus refers to Himself as the “Son of Man,” a title first used in Daniel 7:13.
- Levi (St. Matthew), one of the disciples, was a tax collector when he was called by Jesus.
- Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners at a party thrown by Levi, demonstrating that He came to call sinners to repentance.
- Jesus’ disciples didn’t fast because He was with them; He prophesied that they would fast when He left (in His Ascension).
- Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.

MAP



MARK 2:1-12

Chapter two begins by showing the result of the man healed from leprosy telling everyone about his healing (1:45): people wanting healing mobbed the house where Jesus stayed (most scholars believe this is still the house in which Jesus healed St. Peter’s mother-in-law). The house was so crowded that four men, desperate to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus, created an opening in the roof of the house and lowered their friend to the floor. Jesus was pleased by their faith, and healed the man.

The scribes were shocked by what they considered to be Jesus’ blasphemous forgiveness of the man’s sins, because only God can forgive sins. At first we may be puzzled by Jesus’ question in response to the scribes: is it easier to grant forgiveness or healing? He asked this because there is no immediate, obvious proof that a person has been forgiven of sins, whereas it is easy to tell whether a person has been healed. Jesus used the healing as evidence that He had the authority to forgive sins because, if He didn’t have this authority, the man would not have been healed.

IT’S IN THE BIBLE...

The title “Son of Man” comes from Daniel 7:13, where a messianic figure comes down from God to exercise His rule. As we shall see, in St. Mark’s Gospel Jesus refers to Himself as the “Son of Man” in three ways: describing His activity and authority on earth (2:10, 28; 10:45), predicting His suffering and death (8:31; 9:31; 10:33), and prophesying His glorious return and rule (8:38; 14:62).



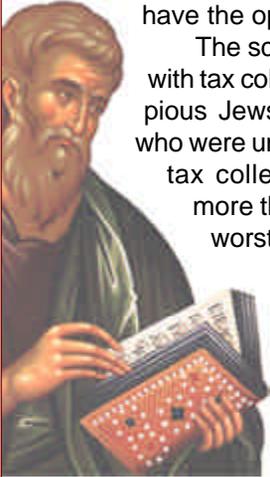
OUR FAITH TEACHES

The fact that Jesus is the Son of Man emphasizes that He is fully human, just as His being the Son of God (John 20:31) emphasizes that He is fully God. Jesus’ full humanity is very important for us as humans, as St. Symeon the New Theologian, a tenth century saint who defended Orthodox spirituality, explains:

The purpose of the incarnate economy of God the Word, which is proclaimed by all the divine scriptures and which we read but do not understand, is surely summed up by saying that He has shared in what was ours to let us share in what was His. The Son of God became the Son of Man in order to make us men the sons of God. By grace He lifts up our race to what He is by nature. He gives birth to us from on high in the Holy Spirit, and then straightway leads us into the kingdom of heaven; or rather, He gives us the grace to have this kingdom within us. We therefore have more than just the hope of entering here; we really possess it as we cry out: ‘Our life is hidden with Christ in God’ (Colossians 3:3).

MARK 2:13-22

The story of the calling of Levi (St. Matthew) shows that Jesus can not only conquer evil and heal sick bodies — He can also heal sick souls. Levi was a tax collector — a group of people who not only made their livings by overcharging the people on their taxes, but did so on behalf of the pagan Romans who occupied Judea. Levi, however, not only immediately left behind this sinful life and followed Jesus, but he also celebrated by throwing a party and inviting his friends so that they could have the opportunity to meet Jesus.



The scribes were shocked that Jesus ate with tax collectors and other sinners, because pious Jews kept their distance from people who were unclean. The scribes even called the tax collectors *hamartolos*, which means more than simply sinners — it means the worst type of sinners, which one Bible paraphrase vividly translates as “scum.” Jesus corrected the scribes, saying that He came to earth specifically to reach sinners and bring them to repentance and relationship with Him.

Both Pharisees and disciples of St. John the Baptist confronted Jesus about fasting: since faithful Jews fasted, why didn't Jesus' disciples? Jesus answered that it would be inappropriate for His followers to fast while He is with them (just as nobody fasts at a wedding feast), but that they will fast after He leaves (in His Ascension to heaven). Jesus' presence, in the words of St. Gregory the Theologian, was a time for gladness, rather than mournful fasting. Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver further explains that, in the context of Jesus' words here and in Matthew 9:15, Christian fasting is partially intended to remind Christians that Jesus Christ will one day return in glory.



WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

- What does it mean for me that Jesus Christ is fully human?
- What did Jesus tell the scribes at Levi's party was the reason for which He came?
- St. Mark relates several of the things Jesus said about fasting and the Sabbath. How can I engage in fasting and observing a day of worship to deepen my relationship with God?



OUR FAITH TEACHES

St. John of Kronstadt explains the reasons for fasting:

Fasting is a good teacher: (1) It soon makes everybody who fasts understand that man needs very little food and drink, and that in general we are greedy and eat a great deal more than is necessary. (2) Fasting clearly discloses all the sins and defects, all the weaknesses and diseases, of our soul, just as when one begins to clean out muddy stagnant water the reptiles and dirt that lurk in it are revealed. (3) It shows us the necessity of turning to God with the whole heart, and of seeking his mercy, help and saving grace. (4) Fasting shows us all the craftiness, cunning and malice of the bodiless spirits, whom we have hitherto unwittingly served, and who now malignantly persecute us for having ceased to follow them.

MARK 2:23-28

The Pharisees later criticized Jesus and His disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath (violating the law against working on the Sabbath). Jesus reminded them that David and his men ate showbread that had been offered to God (1 Samuel 21:1-6); this is important because David eating the showbread was a greater violation of the Law than plucking grain on the Sabbath, and yet David was not condemned for His action. Likewise, the Sabbath was not created simply to be a religious rule that must be imposed on life, but instead was created by God to meet the physical and spiritual needs of humans.

LOOK AT YOURSELF

Everyone needs time for rest, to meditate on our lives and our relationship with God, and to pray without worrying about school or work. Bishop Mitrophan Znosko gives an excellent suggestion about observing Sunday as a Sabbath: “Sunday, the day of the Resurrection, is not a day to spend sitting around the home mesmerized in front of the television or going shopping; it is the day to go to church, to pray, and to reinvigorate our lives. Sunday is intended to be an active commemoration of the Lord.” What can you do on Sunday to grow in communion with God?