

Homily. 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. B. 10/11 February 2024. There was a hint of what was coming early in Jesus life and in Mark's gospel. It happened after his baptism by John, when Jesus was driven into the wilderness to be surrounded by wild beasts and be tempted by Satan. Apart from this one scene and verse the rest of Chapter 1 of the gospel has been a trouble free success story. All of that changes from now onwards and for the remainder of the story St. Mark tells to us.

Why is this so and what is this change? Well, Mark wrote his Good News, addressed to the Roman Church, around 66AD just after the great fire of Rome which that mad and bad Emperor Nero blamed on the Christians. Remember, this is the same Church that saw the savage martyrdoms of both Sts. Peter and Paul, a faith community feeling the heat in more ways than one. Some Christians were freaking out and flaking off from their faith and membership of the Church because it was getting to hot for their liking. When St. Mark looked at Jesus life he saw that behind everything and in every encounter lay the Cross, the Calvary reality, and that within the Cross and our own sharing in it also lay our hope and victory. Mark saw that as it was for the Lord, so too it must be for us who follow him.

In the healing of a leper, made clean and whole by Jesus generous love, the shadow of the Cross fell definitively for the first time over him. It would keep falling over him ever more starkly until it had him in its grip on a hill just outside Jerusalem. In a way it's fair to say that the Cross of Christ is the thing that mattered most to Mark since it showed Jesus to be Lord and God for us in an unmistakable way. Hence, the way that we get to grips with the Cross in our lives makes or breaks us as his followers. Back in those times people thought lepers were unclean, physically,

morally and spiritually. This leper broke the laws of his society by coming up close to Jesus, breathing out his disease and impurity. He believed it was risk worth taking because as he said 'If you want to, you can cure me.' Jesus compassion for his situation and suffering led him to break the laws, too. He reached out and touched this man saying 'Of course I want to. Be cured,' As we know, they ended up nailing Jesus to the Cross for breaking some Jewish laws and some of those of Rome as well. As for the man, he was set free from his disease and isolation, made whole by God's mercy and love. Despite Jesus begging him not to say how his healing had happened he couldn't contain his joy nor hold back from sharing his good news. Isn't the Cross the source of our Good News, for after all don't we name it as Good Friday?

Yet there is a price for this grace, a cost demanded by this world. Grace is free for the receiver, but it's never cheap for the giver of the gift. Jesus substituted himself for the leper, staying outside the towns in places where nobody lived, leper-like himself until the authorities could be sure he wasn't infected by the dreaded disease. One day, not too far off and drawing ever closer, this is how he would end up dying, alone on a hill. But, did you hear that line about people still seeking him out? That they kept coming for his wisdom, compassion and healing? By his wounds we are made whole. Even now, a damaged people and a broken world flocks to the broken wounded One for hope, healing and life and we always will.

We are those people who come to him. We're also asked to be like him for others today. This is our call and mission; that of St. Mark's persecuted Roman Church and of our Corinda-Graceville community here and now. It's the real reason why we gather to hear and to receive the

Word of God, the Eucharist which makes the power of Christ's Cross current with out times. For the Cross of hard and barren wood becomes the tree of life for all. Their is no other true Cross, and their is no other way that works.