

## Reflections on the Gospel of Mark and the Nonviolent Jesus



The Diocese of Rochester's Spirit Alive! Renewal project is encouraging all Catholics in the diocese to read and study the Gospel of Mark between the beginning of Advent, 2008 and the end of Lent, 2009. In support of that effort, this resource provides some thoughts on how the Gospel of Mark calls us to nonviolence.

The Spirit Alive! organizers remind us that "This Gospel was written for early Christians experiencing persecution or death for their faith." The Gospel of Mark tells Jesus' story succinctly, you won't find sermons on the mount or the plain, or lengthy passages of teachings. But you will find a powerful example of a nonviolent redeemer who compassionately heals the wounded, feeds the hungry and speaks out clearly against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. This Gospel is perhaps best read not in passages, but in its entirety. Its brief 16 chapters provide a rapid view of Jesus' public life, inviting re-reading for greater insight. As you come back to the Gospel for reflection and study, here are some thoughts to consider:

(1:14) Fortified by prayer and despite the arrest of John, Jesus proclaims, "The Kingdom of God is at hand." *Why does the gospel writer link these events so closely?*

The Pharisees and scribes play an important role in nearly every chapter; Jesus seems almost to goad them for clinging to their strict rules and their inability to grasp the heart of the law, love. *Are there times that we allow rules to get in the way of love?*

(2:16) We all have powerful frames of reference for processing life's experiences. *Do we need some "new wineskins" in order to let the Gospel change our hearts?*

(3:1-6) The Pharisees watched to see whether Jesus would heal the man's shriveled hand on the Sabbath. Jesus looks at them with "anger and grieved at their hardness of heart," and then heals the man. The Pharisees begin to plot his death. *What parts of my life need to be inspired by Jesus courage to stand up for what is right, even if others disapprove?*

(4:1-20) The parable of the sower seems to reassure the Christians that their faithfulness in the face of persecution will bear great fruit. Some will not have deep roots and will not be able to stay faithful; others are too tempted by the ways of the world - anxiety, desire for comfort and riches. Temptation is subtle; it often uses the guise of practicality to lead us from the truth. *What tempts you to stray from the Gospel call to love God and neighbor?*

(4:26-32) In our increasingly insular society sometimes it's hard to see that our faithfulness will bear fruit. *Who feeds your faith? Where do you look for a community of believers who can support you?*

(8: 31-33) Since we are humans, it's not surprising that, like Peter, we usually think as humans, not as God. *Can you ask God for a spirit of openness and humility as you reflect on where God is calling you?*

(8:34-38) *Are you ready to accept the conditions of discipleship?*

The forces that draw us away from the Gospel may be more subtle than those facing the early Christians', but they can be even more effective. The **Vow of Nonviolence** calls us to imitate the example of Jesus in all aspects of our lives. After reflecting on the Gospel of Mark, you may want to consider spending some time reflecting on this vow and considering whether it could lead you to a deeper relationship with Jesus.

(9:33-37, 10: 35-45) When his disciples jockey for powerful positions in this kingdom, Jesus reminds them that in this kingdom the greatest will be those who have learned to serve others and have taken on the simplicity of a child. Discipleship comes with cost; persecution is likely.

(11:1-11, 11:15-19, 12:38-40) After winning over the crowds with his compassionate, miraculous healings and his compelling teaching, Jesus responds to their tributes and accolades by riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, a caricature of a conquering hero. How often have we been disconcerted by the apparent foolishness of those who stand up for their beliefs - the lone placard bearer outside a death penalty trial, the woman who always adds a prayer for justice to the Mass intentions, the small group being arrested for nonviolent protest? *What would I take a public stand for, even in the face of persecution or finger pointing?*

(13:3-13) *Would I remain a faithful follower of Jesus in the face of persecution and rejection? How does my life reflect that?*

(14:55-61, 14:62, 15:2-5) Jesus' example of nonviolent witness persists through slander and persecution. He refuses to deny the truth even when he knows it confirms his death sentence. *How would your life change if you committed to responding to all that life presents you non-violently? What would be the hardest?* Throughout the Gospel of Mark, Jesus assures us that faith is enough to provide all the strength we need. *Can you be like the father of the demonic boy (9:24) and pray, "I do believe, help my unbelief!"?*

15:16-39 Jesus is mocked, scourged and finally led away to be crucified, rejected and deserted by all. He perseveres even when it seems that God himself has deserted him. We are told that his example converts the centurion. *How is this a message to the persecuted Christians that their faithfulness to the Gospel in face of trouble will help the Kingdom grow like the mustard seed? Do I sometimes need reassurance that my efforts will bear fruit?*

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus speaks out against the injustice and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes even as they plot to kill him. He preaches the good news that the Kingdom of God has come, one based on the foundational law of love of God and neighbor. *How does Jesus provide a model for nonviolent resistance?*

*Source: Peace Subcommittee, Diocesan Public Policy Committee, Rochester, NY, 2008*