

The Way of Discipleship – (8:27-9:1)

I. THE TURNING POINT (8:27-33)

After sending on his way the man whom Jesus had healed progressively from his blindness and leaving Bethsaida, Jesus and his disciples set out on the road to Caesarea Philippi.

It is here that Mark reaches a turning point in his Gospel, the point to which everything has been leading so far.

After opening his work with the words, **“the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,”** he has shown Jesus in action and teaching but nowhere has any human witness guessed his real identity.

- To his adversaries he is demon-possessed:
- to the crowd he is Elijah, or an ancient prophet come back;
- To Herod he is John the Baptist risen from the dead.

To the disciples, who have shared his life most intimately, he is still a puzzle, despite all the signs they have seen him work, they do not understand (8:21).

- Now they will reach their first true insight, forecast in Mark's opening line: **“You are the Messiah.”**

Read: Mark 8:27-33

[27] And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?"

[28] And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets."

[29] And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter

**answered him, "You are the Christ."
[30] And he charged them to tell no one about him.**

A. Caesarea Philippi

Along the way, as they walked from Bethsaida towards Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" What is the public opinion about me? What are the rumors?

Here we have the first "Gallup poll" of public opinion about Jesus. Some 19% say you are John the Baptist! 15% say Elijah! 7% say one of the prophets!

Remarkably there seems to be no public opinion that Jesus might be the messiah, despite a high expectation by some Jews that God would send some sort of messiah.

But enough of polls! Now Jesus wants to know what his own disciples think about him.

"But who do you say that I am?"

It is Simon, whom Jesus has renamed Peter (Rock, 3:16) who speaks here, both in his own name and, as elsewhere, for the Twelve: **"You are the Christ (the Messiah)."**

B. Christ/Messiah

What does the title Messiah mean? Literally, it means "**anointed one.**"

Israel's hopes for future salvation took on many forms. Some believed that the messiah would be:

- a prophet like Moses, others,
- an anointed messenger, and still others,
- A heavenly deliverer called the Son of Man who would inaugurate God's rule or kingdom.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) explains what the title means:

CCC 695 Christ (Greek "**christos**"; Hebrew "**messiah**") means the one "**anointed**" by God's Spirit. There were several anointed ones of the Lord in the Old Covenant, pre-eminently King David.³¹ But Jesus is God's Anointed in a unique way . . . the Holy Spirit established him as "Christ."³²

II. A SUFFERING MESSIAH (8:31-33)

After Peter's confession of faith, Jesus tells them to tell no one about him. He doesn't want the people to have a false expectation of the Messiah - expectations fed by many false ideas surrounding the figure of the Messiah.

Some thought he would be a political leader; others, a warrior king like David, but certainly not the Suffering Servant described in Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12.

Read: Mark 8:31-33

31] And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

[32] And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside, and began to rebuke him.

[33] But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men."

C. Son of Man

In the Gospels, Jesus habitually designates himself by the title of **Son of Man**, a mysterious expression which, while veiling the most

transcendent aspect of his person (his divinity), at the same time suggests it.

On one level “son of man” means simply “man,” but in Daniel 7:13-14 it suggests divinity, and elsewhere in Mark the Son of Man stands for the glorious figure in Dan 7:13-14:

*13] I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a **son of man**, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.*

*[14] And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve **him**; **his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away**, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

In Jewish tradition this figure, the **Son of Man**, is understood to be an individual, and he is identified with the Messiah but there was nothing in the tradition that predicted a suffering messiah.

D. Prophecy of the Passion

The first prophecy of the passion is a direct response to Peter's confession of faith. Let's look at verse 31 in detail and try to put yourselves in the place of the disciples, who loved Jesus, as they hear these awful words.

- **“The Son of Man must suffer many things.”** This recalls the shocking picture of the suffering servant in Isaiah 52: 13 – 53:12, who bears the “sins of the many.”
- **“He will be rejected.”** This not only predicts the future but echoes psalm 118:22 (the stone rejected by the builders), which Jesus later quotes in Mark 12:10.
- (Psalm 118 is one of the Hallel psalms sung at Passover).

- “**By the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes.**” These are the authorities in Jerusalem and their “theologians,” who support them with scriptural justification for their position.
- “**And be killed.**” Jesus does not mention the cross here though it can be inferred from 8:34. It is sufficient at his first prediction of the passion to foretell his death by violence, as Isaiah had prophesied (53:8).
- “**And after three days rise again.**” In this prediction there is an echo of an Old Testament text about the consolation of Israel after a time of suffering (Hosea 6:1-2).

Jesus’ prediction of his suffering was a shocking announcement, on the basis of Isaiah 52 to 53, of *how* the final victory would be achieved.

If we wish to follow Christ we too will suffer and share the glory.

E. Peter’s Response

Peter, of course, is shocked and distressed by the thought of Jesus’ suffering and death. God would never allow this. It is unthinkable! This must not happen to the messiah – the one like King David who would conquer the oppressors and liberate Israel!

So he presumes to correct Jesus – the disciple rebukes his master, but he does so in private.

Jesus, in turn, rebukes Peter in front of all the disciples.

- The sharpest reprimand in the gospel is reserved for the one chosen to lead the others and strengthen them in their faith.

Get behind me expresses Jesus rejection of Satan, who was using Peter as a mouthpiece. But at the same time it expresses his command to Peter to follow *behind him* as his disciple, not presume to lead him.

Peter is acting like Satan because in his fear and misguided compassion he is opposing God's will for Jesus. Peter wants to take the easy way, rather than the way of the Cross.

Reflection

To what degree is my thinking in line with God's thinking? How can I tell?

III. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP (8:34-38)

We are now not only at the midpoint of Mark's gospel but also at its heart. Who is Jesus? He is the Son of God who will suffer and die and rise.

- What does it mean to be his follower? It means sharing his destiny.

Read: Mark 8:34-38

[34] And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

[35] For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

[36] For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?

[37] For what can a man give in return for his life?

[38] For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

F. Losing one's Life to Save it

Jesus has just told his disciples that his path to Glory is through suffering and death. These sayings of Jesus are directed not only at the intimate disciples who would become the leaders of Mark's community but to **everyone who follows Jesus**.

G. Am I Ashamed of Jesus and His Teaching?

This is some of the most difficult and challenging teaching in the whole Gospel.

No one likes to be confronted with stark choices between eternal life and eternal condemnation, yet this is what Christ said we must face.

Our tendency is to compromise between the holy and the worldly in a way that allows us to reap the maximum benefits while paying the minimum price. We do not want to renounce our ways, take up the cross and follow Jesus.

If the weak, disloyal or faithless disciple is foolish enough to be ashamed of Jesus and his words before this “adulterous and sinful generation,” then the **Son of Man** will in turn will be ashamed of him at the final judgment.

Reflection

- *Have I ever soft-pedaled or diluted my beliefs as a Christian because of social pressure?*
- *Because of the fear of human disapproval or ridicule?*

What do I do when there's a conflict between the words of Jesus and the morals of the society in which I live?

- *Am I pressured to modify my words and behavior so as to win approval and avoid derision from the world?*

*The danger of refashioning Christianity into something more safe and comfortable is summed up in Jesus' challenge to Peter: **“You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”***

Chapter 9:1

I. THY KINGDOM COME

The first verse of Chapter 9 continues the teaching Jesus began in 8:34. Remember, Mark wrote his Gospel with no chapter divisions; these were added much later.

When will the Kingdom of God come in Power?

[1] And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

The last verse of this section (9:1) has been a puzzle for interpreters. It seems that Jesus is promising his return in Glory during the lifetime of some of his listeners. This is how many early Christians appear to have understood it. Was Jesus mistaken?

Jesus proclaimed that the **Kingdom of God** was at hand (1:15), and through Jesus' healings and exorcisms, his teaching and the calling of the disciples, Jesus was establishing God's reign or kingdom. However God's reign is not yet fully established.

Some interpreters think that Jesus is speaking about the Transfiguration which is just six days away. In this interpretation, the present generation of Jesus' followers would be granted, even before their deaths, a vision of the Kingdom of God coming in Glory, in the Transfiguration.

Yet in another interpretation according to the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (see footnote on 9:1):

"Jesus promises to inaugurate his kingdom within the lifetime of the apostles (1:15). This begins with Christ's heavenly enthronement (16:19) and the birth of the Church. Its authority is manifested with

the termination of the Old Covenant, when Jerusalem and the Temple are destroyed with fire” (Luke 21:31-32).

- *“The kingdom, while present in mystery in the Church, will be fully manifest at the consummation of history (CCC 669 – 71)”.*

*The Gospel of Mark by Mary Healy (pg 171) suggests that it is Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection from the dead that reveals God’s triumphant power over sin and death, whom **some standing here** would **see** (either by faith or by sight) and recognize as the coming of the kingdom.”*

IV. THE TRANSFIGURATION (9:2-8)

A. The Glory to Come

Jesus had begun to teach his disciples who he was and what it meant to be called disciples. Having forewarned of them of his impending death and resurrection, he called **Peter, James** and **John** aside to offer them a glimpse of the Glory that was to come.

The announcement of his suffering, death and resurrection had perplexed the disciples and raised troubling questions in their minds.

Through the transfiguration, seeing the glory of Jesus assures them of his divine Sonship and foreshadows their own glorification at the resurrection. This divine revelation strengthened their belief and gave a glimpse of the future heavenly kingdom.

Read: Mark 9:2-8

[2] And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, [3] and his garments became dazzling white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them.

[4] And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus.

[5] And Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

[6] For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid.

[7] And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

[8] And suddenly looking around they no longer saw any one with them but Jesus only.

B. Peter, James, and John

Jesus brings only his closest companions, Peter, James, and John, those who would have special leadership positions in the early Church, and would most need to be strengthened in faith to lead the others on the difficult road ahead.

C. A High Mountain

This mountain is traditionally identified with Mt. Tabor in Galilee.

- Theologically, it is the New Covenant counterpart to Mount Sinai.

"Jesus was transfigured before them, his humanity radiating his majesty as Son of God, the Glory that will be fully and permanently revealed at his second coming" (8:38; 13:26).

Jesus manifests his divine splendor on Mt. Tabor, just as God revealed his glory to Moses and Elijah on Mt. Sinai.

D. Moses and Elijah

Elijah and Moses represent the prophets (Elijah) and the Law (Moses) of the Old Testament. Together they testify that Jesus is the foretold messiah and a mediator of the new covenant.

- Moses was the great law giver but was considered a prophet as well (Deut 18:15, 18).
- Elijah was a wonder-working prophet who was expected to return before “***the day of the Lord***” (Mal 3:23).

Significantly Moses and Elijah are the only two individuals described in the Old Testament as ascending Mount Sinai (also known as Mt.Horeb).

Their presence here may be an indication that what happened on this mountain (Tabor) is to be compared with what happened on Mount Sinai.

Elijah and Moses were conversing with Jesus, but Mark does not tell us what they were talking about. It is Luke who tells us that they were discussing Jesus' coming departure (his death and resurrection).

E. The Cloud of God's Presence

And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

The ***cloud*** envelops them – Jesus, Moses, and Elijah – obscuring them from the disciples view. What follows makes it clear that this ***cloud*** is a manifestation of God's presence, just as a cloud manifested God's presence on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:9) and in the Temple (1 Kings 8:10-12).

F. Listen to Him

The command to ***listen to him*** recalls Moses' promise that God would one day raise up 'a prophet like me . . . from among your own kinsmen; to him you shall listen" (Deut 18:15). Jesus is the *prophet-like-Moses* to whom, raised up, the people must listen.

The Father uses this passage to identify Jesus as the Mosaic prophet (Jn 6:14; Acts 3:22).

But Jesus is more – He is God's very own Son, who reveals the person and will of God. He must be listened to even when he speaks of humiliation and suffering.

Then, Moses and Elijah vanish, leaving Jesus to go to the cross alone.

Yet this day of glory has been forever seared on the memories of the disciples as a deep mystical experience of the twofold pattern foretold in Isaiah: the Lord's servant will be glorified (52:13-15) but only after suffering and death (53:1-12).

V. THE COMING OF ELIJAH (9:9-13)

Read: Mark 9:9-13

[9] And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of man should have risen from the dead.

[10] So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.

[11] And they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?"

[12] And he said to them, "Elijah does come first to restore all things; and how is it written of the Son of man, that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?"

[13] But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him."

A. Coming Down the Mountain

Jesus does not remain on the mountaintop basking in his transfigured glory. He must descend to the valley to continue his

mission – overcoming evil and death - until he climbs the hill of Calvary for the final victory!

From Tabor to Calvary! From glory to suffering! Jesus leads the way – we follow! “As the Head goes, so goes the Body!”

We too must come down from our mountaintop encounter with Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit, and take up our cross! This means entering into combat with the Evil One and the evil within us.

B. Rising From the Dead

The disciples do not question what “rising from the dead” means in general, but what it means for *Jesus*. Why should he have to experience death before rising to glory? Elijah, after all, was carried up into glory without being put to death.

Note: Jews who believed in a general resurrection of the dead thought that it would occur at the end of the present age, when all the dead would rise and be judged by God.

C. Reappearance of Elijah

Elijah's reappearance was a common expectation based on the prophecy of Malachi 4:5. God promised to send Elijah to prepare Israel for his arrival on the “day of the LORD” at the end of the age. Elijah's mission was to restore family relationships (Malachi 4:5-6; RSV) and the tribes of Israel.

The gist of the disciples question is: If the end of the age has come where is Elijah? Jesus affirms that: “Elijah will indeed come first and restore all things,” referring to Elijah's mission of preparing the people through repentance and the healing of family relationships broken by sin.

In fact, Jesus asserts “that Elijah has already come,” and the disciples understand him to mean John the Baptist (Mt 17:13), who fulfills this prophetic role.

D. Elijah's Suffering

But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased . . .

As Elijah suffered at the hands of King Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel (1Kings 19:1-10), so John the Baptist suffered martyrdom by Herod Antipas and his hateful mistress Herodias (6:27).

VI. THE POWER OF FAITH AND PRAYER (9:14-29)

After the transfiguration, Jesus and the three disciples approach the remaining disciples, only to find them disputing with the scribes and surrounded by a crowd.

Jesus asks his disciples what they're discussing, but before they can answer, a man from the crowd blurts out the story. His son is possessed by a “**dumb**” or “**mute**” spirit, that is, by an evil spirit that prevents his son from speaking.

The symptoms resemble those of epilepsy, but behind them the power of evil is at work, keeping the child in real bondage and even threatening his life.

The seizures seem to be evidence of a malevolent intent to destroy his son, since the boy is driven toward suicidal actions.

“It is the last exorcism in Mark, and it symbolically reveals the ultimate aim of Jesus' deliverance of humanity from evil: resurrection from the dead” (Gospel of Mark – Healy – pg 178).

Read: Mark 9:14-29

14] And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd about them, and scribes arguing with them.

[15] And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and ran up to him and greeted him.

[16] And he asked them, "What are you discussing with them?"

[17] And one of the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit;

[18] and wherever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able."

[19] And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."

[20] And they brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

[21] And Jesus asked his father, "How long has he had this?" And he said, "From childhood.

[22] And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us."

[23] And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes."

[24] Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

[25] And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again."

[26] And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, "He is dead."

[27] But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he

arose.

[28] And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"

[29] And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

A. The Disciples' Failure

The boy's father, assuming that the disciples had the same power as Jesus, brings the boy to them.

But they are unable to cast out the evil spirit in this particularly stubborn case, even though, commissioned by Jesus, they have successfully exorcised demons before (Mark 6:13).

- The disciples need to grow in faith, just like a father.

B. Faithless Generation

Jesus' exasperated rebuke is apparently addressed not to the father but to the disciples.

"O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you?"

Why were they unable to cast out this demon? Jesus explains:
"This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer (and fasting)."

C. The Power of Faith

". . . If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us."

Jesus replies: **"If you can! All things are possible to him who believes."**

The issue is not whether Jesus can cure the boy, but whether his father is willing to believe it. The father, who struggles with unbelief, asks Jesus' to increase his faith.

"If Jesus can" is never in question! There is no limit to his power; the only limitation is the barrier created by unbelief!

Jesus sees that the father first needs to be healed of his lack of faith, and so he challenges him: "If you believe, all things are possible, even this." The father answers with a shout that both affirms his belief and yet shows he is aware that he needs Jesus' help even to believe adequately: **"I believe; help my unbelief!"**

- Mark presents the father's cry as a prayer for all those who waver in faith.

Reflection:

Do I take Jesus' pronouncement that everything is possible for the one who has faith as an exaggeration? Or do I take Jesus at his word?

Jesus then commands the spirit to come out of the boy. The spirit departs in a final show of contempt, shouting and throwing the boy into convulsions.

"With this detail Mark portrays the heightening of demonic resistance to Jesus, who has been taking ground from Satan's kingdom step by step since the beginning of the Gospel. But once again the tantrums are mere bluster. The spirit, powerless before the Lord's command, departs in defeat" (*Gospel of Mark – Mary Healy - pg. 180*).

D. A Lesson for the Disciples

The conclusion to this story is a lesson for the disciples.

Jesus had indeed given them the power to cast out demons, and they had used it with success. But apparently they had assumed that the power was at their command without needing their own faith-reliance on Jesus, the source of it.

The Church of Mark's day - and ours - is being told that its charismatic power is not to be taken for granted. Ministry must be backed by a power house of prayer.

THE ROUGH ROAD OF DISCIPLESHIP (9:30-50)

I. SECOND PROPHECY OF THE PASSION (9:30-32)

Setting out from the mount of the Transfiguration (9:2-8), Jesus and his disciples make their way **through Galilee** toward Jerusalem.

Read: Mark 9:30-32

[30] They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he would not have any one know it;

[31] for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise."

[32] But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him.

A. Change in Ministry

But this time the action is very different from Jesus' Galilean ministry. He is now no longer healing, driving out demons, and preaching to the crowds, on the contrary, He seems to be avoiding them.

Instead of teaching multitudes by the sea or being mobbed by crowds bringing the needy and afflicted, Jesus is privately instructing his disciples in the final and most intensive part of their formation.

Jesus is walking in the shadow of the cross and his energy is spent entirely on his disciples. A second time Jesus foretells his passion, this time using the expression "delivered up" [or "handed over"] into the hands of men.

B. Jesus Identifies with Our Humanity

“Jesus is Son of Man in that he has fully identified himself with humanity and shares our nature with all its frailty. Yet he is handed over to men as if from the side of God, to be subject to all the concentrated violence of human rebellion against God” (*Gospel of Mark* – Mary Healy, pg. 183).

C. Afraid to Ask

This time Peter and the disciples voice no protest (8:32), but remain in stunned silence. ***They do not understand the saying.*** Jesus' words were simple enough at face value. What part of “be killed” is hard to understand?

With the hindsight of 2000 years of Christian catechesis we have to strive to appreciate how utterly shocking, counter-intuitive, and worldview-shattering was this idea of a suffering Messiah.

It simply did not fit into any of the preconceived categories of Jesus' contemporaries. They are terrified to ask Jesus what his words mean, in case their worst fears are confirmed - and so they remain silent.

II. TRUE GREATNESS

Jesus has been traveling through Galilee with his disciples, instructing them in private, and now they come to Capernaum, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus used Capernaum as his base of operations during his public ministry in Galilee, staying in Peter's house.

Read: Mark 9:33-37

[33] And they came to Capernaum-um; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?"
[34] But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed

with one another who was the greatest.

[35] And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

[36] And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them,

[37] "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

A. Christian Leadership

Just after Jesus' second prophecy of his passion, the disciples, with amazing insensitivity to Jesus' coming suffering, argue about who is the greatest among them.

Jesus uses the argument going on behind his back to teach his disciples about how authority should be exercised in his Church – not by lording it over others, but by serving them.

"If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

“Greatness in God’s eyes is measured by humility and service to others. As future leaders of the church, the apostles must shun aspirations for worldly honors and attention in order to serve Christ more faithfully and effectively (ICSB, comment on 9:35).”

III. ANOTHER EXORCIST

Read: Mark 9:38-41

[38] John said to him, "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us."

[39] But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil

of me.

[40] For he that is not against us is for us.

[41] For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward.

A. Openness to other Christians

The Apostle John complains about a man who has been spotted **driving out demons** in Jesus' name, even though he does not belong to the band of Jesus' disciples. Apparently his criterion for legitimate ministry is acting under the disciples' authority.

Jesus warns the apostles, and through them all Christians, against exclusivism when acting or ministering in His name. We have to be open to those who work in Jesus' name, such as our Protestant brothers and sisters, even though they do not belong to the Catholic Church.

Read: Reflection and Application (9:38-41) in the *Gospel of Mark* by Mary Healy pg. 188

IV. TEMPTATION TO SIN

Read: Mark 9:42-50

[42] "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

[43] And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

[45] And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.

[47] And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better

for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell,

[48] where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

[49] For everyone will be salted with fire.

[50] Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

A. Scandal (Public Sin)

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin . . ."

Jesus had taken a child in his arms (9:36), providing a link for this next teaching. ***"Little one"*** is synonymous with ***"child"*** in (9:36-37), but, as before, it refers more broadly to those who are weak or vulnerable in their faith.

The Greek word translated as ***to sin*** means to stumble, to be scandalized. Woe to anyone who makes children or weaker Christians stumble, leading them to sin, ***for it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.***

B. Seriousness of Sin

Jesus uses hyperbole (overstatement, exaggeration) to emphasize that drastic measures are needed to avoid sin.

Because public sin, or scandal, can encourage others to sin in like manner, the consequences that await those who cause scandal are worse than drowning by the weight of a great ***millstone***.

C. Occasions of Sin

The next three sayings of Jesus consider the effects of sin on oneself, rather than on others – private sin rather than public sin (9:43-48).

After teaching the obligation everyone has to avoid giving scandal to others, Jesus now gives the basis of Christian moral teaching on the subject of “occasions of sin” - situations liable to lead to sin.

Because grave (mortal) sins merit **hell** (9:43, 45, 47) avoiding them requires us to take action so serious that it can be compared to cutting off hands and feet, etc. to save the body (soul, person) – just as a surgeon would do to save a life.

The Fathers of the Church see, in these references to hands and feet and so forth, people who are persistent in evil and ever-ready to entice others to evil behavior and erroneous beliefs.

These are the people we should separate (cut-off) ourselves from, so as to enter life, rather than accompany them to hell.

D. Hell

“Hell,” literally “*Gehenna*” or “*Gehinnom*,” was a little valley south of Jerusalem, outside the walls and below the city. It was a refuse dump, and it’s maggot-infested and smoldering garbage was used in Jewish tradition as an image for punishment by **unquenchable fire** in the age to come.

Jesus refers to it 11 times in the Gospels as a dreadful symbol of hell. (See “Word Study” in the IGNATIUS Catholic Study Bible [ICSB], pg. 35).

Jesus teaching on the two possible destinations of human life after death – heaven or hell, eternal joy of union with God or the eternal misery of separation from him – has been constantly reaffirmed throughout Church tradition. Yet it is often brushed over or treated

with outright skepticism by Christians today (See *The Gospel of Mark* by Mary Healy – pg.192).

E. Salted With Fire

There are different interpretations for this verse (9:49). See *The Gospel of Mark* by Mary Healy – pgs 192-194.

Preparation for Week 7

- Read pages 195-218 of *The Gospel of Mark* by Mary Healy.
- Read carefully and prayerfully Chapter 10 of the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB) on the Gospel of Mark.
- Review and answer study questions on page 55 (chapter 10) of the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB) on the Gospel of Mark.