

# The Gospel in Daily Life (Mark 10:1-31)

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Jesus leaves Galilee for the last time and begins the long journey towards Jerusalem, crucifixion and death.

He resumes his public teaching in the territory where John the Baptist denounced Herod Antipas for his adulterous union with Herodias (his brother Phillip's wife), a denouncement that ultimately cost John his life.

He also continues to instruct his disciples privately.

## I. GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

This place is a perfect setting for the Pharisees to set a trap for Jesus by raising the issue of divorce (adultery) as part of a strategy to eliminate him.

- They are hoping He will meet the same fate as John the Baptist.
- They are **testing** Jesus, as did Satan in the desert (1:13)

**Read:** Mark 10:1-12

***[1] And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again; and again, as his custom was, he taught them.***

***[2] And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"***

***[3] He answered them, "What did Moses command you?"***

***[4] They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away."***

***[5] But Jesus said to them, "For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.***

**[6] But from the beginning of creation, `God made them male and female.'**

**[7] `For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,**

**[8] and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh.**

**[9] What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."**

**[10] And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.**

**[11] And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her;**

**[12] and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."**

#### **A. Divorce Allowed by Mosaic Law**

Question: **"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"**

For Jews, **divorce** meant a husband dismissing his wife; a Jewish wife did not have the right to dismiss her husband. In the ancient world, **divorce** usually implied remarriage, not simply separation from one's spouse.

- Divorce was widely accepted in Jewish society based on Mosaic law (Deut 24:1-4), despite the Biblical assertion that God hates **divorce** (Mal 2:16),
- But there was some debate over what constituted sufficient grounds for dismissing a wife.

In Deuteronomy 24:1-4, a man who found "something unclean" that is, shameful (such as immodest conduct), in his wife was permitted to divorce her provided he gave her a written notice or **certificate of divorce**.

*"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some **indecency** in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house . . ." (Deut 24:1)*

## B. Two Schools of Thought

The question concerning what constituted **indecency** or "something unclean" was debated between the two rabbinical schools (Hillel and Shammai) of Jesus' time.

- Shammai limited it to something moral or religious in nature;
- Hillel allowed practically anything that annoyed the husband.

## C. Is Divorce Lawful?

The Pharisees' questions are aimed at trapping Jesus into going against the Law of Moses.

They suspect that He will deny the legality of **divorce** and thus end up the way John the Baptist did at the hands of Herod Antipas and his mistress Herodias, who had abandoned their spouses to remarry.

Jesus cuts through all the red tape and rationalizing, going straight to:

- the intention of the law they cite, and even beyond it
- to the divine intention for marriage.

## D. The Heart of the Law

***"What did Moses command you?"***

Jesus goes to the heart of the Mosaic Law. Moses permitted Israelite men to divorce their wives under the Old Covenant (Deut 24:1-4). This was a temporary legal concession because of

- Israel's **hardness of heart** (a stubborn refusal to yield to God and his way's), and

- to protect woman's rights.

The purpose of the permission was certainly not to promote divorce, rather, accepting an evil situation, the law sought to protect a wife from abuse and to assure her rights.

### **E. From the Beginning**

But then Jesus goes beyond the law. He revokes Mosaic divorce legislation by returning to God's original intention for marriage as stated in Genesis.

***“Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen 2:24).***

And then Jesus adds by way of clarification:

***“What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”***

According to Genesis and Jesus' clarification in Mark, the married couple becomes one flesh, in a lifelong union of life and love between one man and one woman, and the man (or anyone for that matter) does not have the right to separate what God has bonded together.

- God alone is the creator of marriage and the laws that govern it.
- The marital bond is spiritual, exclusive, and indissoluble.
- Since it is forged by God himself it cannot be broken by any civil or religious authority (CCC 1603, 1640).

### **F. Divorce and Remarriage Prohibited in the New Covenant**

***“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her . . .”***

What may have remained mysterious for the crowds Jesus makes clear to his disciples privately. Divorce amounts to adultery. In the

phrase **“commits adultery against her”** the emphasis falls on the words “against her.”

In Jewish law, a man could only commit adultery against another man (by having sexual relations with the latter’s wife). He could not commit adultery against his wife, though she, by extramarital sex, could commit adultery against him.

### **Reflection and Application**

Pope John Paul the Great uses the corresponding passage in Matthew to begin his magisterial teaching on the *Theology of the Body* (TOB) which contains his profound reflections on human love in the divine plan.

As the Pope explains, it is only by returning to the original purpose of marriage (as Jesus does) that we discover God’s original plan for marriage in which we find the answer to our longing for lasting relationships of authentic love.

God gave us a symbolic key to that plan by creating us in His image as “male and female” – that is, with bodily differences that are designed for union (see the *Gospel of Mark* by Mary Healy re “*Reflection and Application*” pages 198 to 199).

## **II. BLESSING OF THE CHILDREN (10:13-16)**

***[13] And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them.***

***[14] But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God.***

***[15] Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."***

***[16] And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.***

## A. Overview

Mark does not explain why the disciples tried to prevent children from being brought to Jesus, but it is another example of their misunderstanding of who Jesus is and what the kingdom is about.

Jesus welcomes children into the kingdom of God and so lays a foundation for the church's practice of infant baptism (CCC 1250 – 52).

## B. Entry into the Kingdom

To enter the kingdom of God one must become like a little child.

*We are all called to be “children” in relation to the kingdom. What is it about children that make them so suitable for the kingdom?*

- *Children have no accomplishments with which to earn God's favor,*
- *No status that makes them worthy.*

*In their dependency they exemplify the only disposition that makes entrance into the kingdom possible: simply to **receive** it as a pure, unmerited gift (see Matt 5:3).*

This passage is also a parable on man's divine sonship: God is our Father and we are his sons and daughters: his children whom he embraces and blesses.

***And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.***

### III. THE RICH MAN (10:17-31)

#### A. Overview

Jesus has just dealt with **ambition** as an obstacle to entering the kingdom. He holds up a child as model for receiving the gift of the kingdom (10:13-16).

Now, on resuming his journey to Jerusalem and preparing to predict his passion a third time, Jesus deals with another obstacle: **wealth**, both spiritual and material.

The rich young man, like so many of us, wanted the best of both worlds – the fullness of eternal life and worldly riches as well.

***17] And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"***

***[18] And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.***

***[19] You know the commandments: `Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'"***

***[20] And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth."***

***[21] And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."***

***[22] At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.***

***[23] And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"***

***[24] And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the***

**kingdom of God!**

**[25] It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."**

**[26] And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?"**

**[27] Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."**

**[28] Peter began to say to him, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you."**

**[29] Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,**

**[30] who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.**

**[31] But many that are first will be last, and the last first."**

**A. What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?**

No one can escape from the fundamental questions: *What must I do? How do I distinguish good from evil? How do I avoid evil and do good?*

*People today need to turn to Christ once again in order to receive from him the answer to their questions about what is good and what is evil (Veritatis Splendor - VS).*

*The answer is only possible thanks to the splendor of the truth which shines forth deep within the human spirit . . . (VS).*

Jesus reaffirms the necessity of keeping God's moral Laws in the New Covenant. The Commandments he draws to the young man's attention concern relations with one's neighbor.

Our Lord has not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Mt 5:17). The Commandments are the very core of the Law and keeping them is necessary for attaining eternal life. Pope John Paul II said in VS, “. . . a close connection is made between eternal life and obedience to God’s Commandments . . .”

We inherit eternal life, that is, we are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, but once saved, we must live out that faith by obeying the Commandments to maintain our salvation.

*The Ten Commandments lead God’s children to moral maturity and remain integral to our pursuit of “eternal life” (CCC 2068, 2072) and (ICSB note on 10:19).*

## **B. The Dangers of Wealth**

***And Jesus looking upon him loved him . . .***

Jesus loved the young man both for the good life he has lived since his youth, and because he desires to grow in the spiritual life by coming to Jesus. But Jesus challenges him:

- to get rid of his wealth and give it to the poor; and then
- Invites the man to follow him, that is, to become a disciple and to depend on Jesus alone.

***Go sell what you have, and give to the poor . . .***

The unexpected invitation is too much, and the man goes away sad, unable to enter the joy of his Lord. He is too attached to his wealth!

***"How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."***

When Jesus points out how wealth is an obstacle to the kingdom, his disciples are shocked. They were reared on the Old Testament teaching that wealth is a sign of God’s favor (Ps 128:1-2; Job 1:10;

42:10; Is 3:10). This is also known as the prosperity Gospel preached by some of our non-Catholic brothers and sisters.

- The disciples are learning that Jesus' call to discipleship is costly – it requires renunciation.

### C. Then Who Can Be Saved?

***Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."***

We are completely incapable of achieving salvation on our own. The human family descended from Adam suffers from a wounded nature and is unable to obey God completely or consistently without divine assistance.

### D. Reward of Discipleship

***Peter began to say to him, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you."***

Peter, again speaking for all the disciples, joyfully proclaims that they had indeed, unlike the rich man, left everything to follow Jesus. They have forsaken not only wealth but home and family.

Jesus responds solemnly, "***Truly, I say to you . . .***" promising not only eternal life but even now a spiritual abundance and a family a hundred times as great.

This is a spiritual family of which God is father.

### **Reflection and Application (10:23-27)**

*In this teaching on the danger of riches, Jesus does not denounce wealth as evil in itself. In fact, it is remarkable how many of his sayings and parables indirectly affirm the values of ownership, business, trade, and investment. Rather, it is the **attachment** to wealth that is spiritually perilous (Matt 6:24; 1Tim 6:10; Heb 13:5).*

*Exteriorly they have indeed left all behind, yet their squabbling for positions of honor (9:34; 10:40) and their aversion to the prospect of suffering (8:32) show that they have not yet interiorly abandoned all to Jesus.*

*(See Gospel of Mark - Mary Healy - page 206)*

#### **IV. HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM**

Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem with a burning desire to see fulfilled everything that he had foretold about his passion and death.

Now Jesus formally prophesies his death and resurrection for the third and last time. It is the most solemn and detailed of his passion predictions.

He had already told his disciples that he would suffer in Jerusalem, which is why they cannot understand his eagerness to be on his way.

By his own example he is teaching us to carry the cross gladly, not to try to avoid it.

***[32] And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him,***

***[33] saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles;***

***[34] and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise."***

***[35] And James and John, the sons of Zeb'edee, came forward to him, and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us***

***whatever we ask of you."***

***[36] And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?"***

***[37] And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."***

***[38] But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"***

***[39] And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;***

***[40] but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."***

***[41] And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.***

***[42] And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.***

***[43] But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant,***

***[44] and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.***

***[45] For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."***

### **A. Amazed and Afraid**

***And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.***

The disciples may be amazed that Jesus would go to Jerusalem, which is the headquarters of his enemies, and they were probably afraid of what would happen there to Jesus, and maybe to themselves.

## B. Third Prediction of the Passion

Jesus' third prediction contains new elements, specifying that his death will result from a conspiracy of Jewish (chief priests, scribes) and Roman (Gentiles) authority.

- He names Jerusalem explicitly,
- He says the leaders will deliver him to the Gentiles, that is, the Romans (a most incredible ending for the messiah!) and
- He adds details of his passion: "mocked," "scourged", "spit upon."
- He thus predicts the fulfillment of Isaiah 50:6

***"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting;"***

- And Psalm 22:6-7, ***"scorned by men, and despised by the people, all who see me mock at me."***

## C. The Ambition of James and John

***"Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."***

When James and John asked Jesus for the #1 and #2 places of honor and power in his kingdom, they could hardly have chosen a more tactless moment for their request.

Jesus had just prophesied his coming suffering and death and they apparently just brush this off to argue who is the greatest among them.

Jesus does not reproach them for their rashness, but takes the opportunity to teach his disciples that to be great in the kingdom of God, they must become servants – like him.

## D. Drink the Cup . . . Baptized with the Baptism

### ***Are you able to drink the cup that I drink . . . ?***

To drink the cup is a reference to Jesus' forthcoming suffering. It is obviously to accept and undergo a prepared fate.

Biblically, the cup is most often used of the ***cup of God's wrath, the cup of his judgment***, which God's people in some cases, and their enemies in others, must drink for their sins.

- Now Jesus will drink the cup which others deserve, in order to make it possible for them to be saved and healed (Is 53:4-9).
- Justice and Mercy have embraced!
- He will drink the cup of God's wrath; the cup of his judgment, so that sinners may be spared!

The baptism of which Jesus speaks is equivalent to the cup of suffering. It is a baptism or immersion in trial and suffering.

## E. Christian Leadership

### ***But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.***

The ambitions voiced by James and John lead Jesus to clarify the true nature of Christian leadership.

His disciples are not to imitate the Gentile rulers who ***lord it over*** their subjects, but must imitate the example of humility and service Jesus exemplified during his ministry.

"His disciples are to display a radical and countercultural attitude towards leadership. There is no place for self-promotion, rivalry, or domineering conduct among them" (Gospel of Mark - MH, p213).

- **"Servant"** (*diakonos* in Greek) means deacon, primarily someone who serves.

- *“As a participation in the one ecclesiastical ministry, (the deacon) is a specific sacramental sign, in the Church, of **Christ the servant**” (Congregation for the Clergy, 1998).*

#### **F. As a Ransom for Many**

**“For the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

In the New Testament, God purchases his people from slavery in sin by the price of Christ’s own life. His saving death thus ransomed us for freedom and fellowship in the family of God.

Any doubts about whether Jesus is identifying himself with the Lord’s servant of Isaiah (Is 52:13 – 53:12) vanish when we hear his further self description “to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**“Many”** here does not mean the exclusion of some; it is simply a way of referring to the whole people in contrast to the one servant (Is 53:11).

- **“For many = for all.”**
- **“To give his life”** means a voluntary surrender to martyrdom.
- **“Ransom”** means the price of deliverance or liberation, as for the release of a captive or slave.

**Read:** Isaiah 52-53

#### **Reflection and Application – Redemptive Suffering**

(See Gospel of Mark – MH, p215.)

- Our bodies, by being joined to the body of Christ, can be transformed into instruments of redemptive grace.
- Our sufferings, willingly united with his, become in a mysterious but real way the means of grace for others.

## V. BARTIMAEUS RECEIVES HIS SIGHT (10:46-52)

Jesus passes through Jericho, about 15 miles from Jerusalem, on the last leg of his journey to Jerusalem.

It seems likely, that Jesus chose a major feast (Passover) as the occasion of his ascent to Jerusalem, the **great multitude** coming with him out of Jericho are mostly Pilgrims to the holy city.

**Read:** Mark 10:46-52

***[46] And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimae'us, a blind beggar, the son of Timae'us, was sitting by the roadside.***

***[47] And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"***

***[48] And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"***

***[49] And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; rise, he is calling you."***

***[50] And throwing off his mantle he sprang up and came to Jesus.***

***[51] And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Master, let me receive my sight."***

***[52] And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.***

### A. Bartimaeus - A Blind Beggar

Bartimaeus' healing was the last reported incident (miracle) prior to Jesus' entry into the city. There, he would suffer his passion, lay down his life, and take it up again.

## B. Son of David

Hearing that Jesus is passing by, Bartimaeus cries out, “**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy and me.**” His plea, **have mercy (pity) on me**, echoes a cry for God’s mercy found in various psalms.

The beggar addresses Jesus as **Son of David**, which in Mark is highly unusual. It is the title of the Messiah, and never before in Mark’s gospel has it been used by anyone.

Jesus does not deny the title!

Even more unusual, however, is the beggar’s use of the name Jesus. No one up to this point in Mark’s gospel has dared use, much less cry out, *Jesus’* personal name when seeking a cure from him.

Some people try to shut him up but he who will not take “no” for an answer - he cries out all the more, “Jesus, son of David, have mercy me.”

## Reflection

*Fervent prayer springs from having **great needs** and a **great faith** in Jesus’ ability to meet those needs.*

*What are my greatest needs? How strong is my faith that Jesus can meet them?*

*How would I answer Jesus if he asked me, “What do you want me to do for you?”*

## C. Call Him

Jesus hears Bartimaeus’ cries for pity and stops. Even though Jesus is on the most important journey of his life, answering a plea from a nobody takes precedence.

**“Call him,”** Jesus says. Jesus does not call Bartimaeus himself, but asks his disciples to call the blind man to him, reversing their previous stand.

When called, the blind man throws off his cloak, an action symbolizing leaving behind his former way of life, and runs to Jesus.

#### **D. What do you want ... ?**

Jesus, of course, knows the man’s need, as does everyone else. But he asks the question because he wants to respect the freedom of the man and to personally engage and involve him in what follows.

This is a lesson for those who rush to pray for others without asking them what they really want to receive.

The blind man says the obvious, but **he** has said it, and that makes the difference. **“Ask and you shall receive”** – Bartimaeus has asked and made a *specific request*: ***“Master, let me receive my sight.”***

#### **E. The Power of Faith**

***Go your way; your faith has made you well.”***

Faith is a gift of God.

- It was Bartimaeus’ faith and led him to cry out to Jesus,
- To persist in the face of opposition, and
- To come to Jesus when called.

His faith opened him up to the work of Jesus in him and that is an important message for all of us.

#### **F. A New Disciple**

***And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.***

For Bartimaeus, Jesus is God's messiah, and when your life has been totally changed by him, when you can say, "I was blind, but now I see," you want to be with Him wherever he goes.

- A lesson for Mark's community and for us.

## Preparation for Week 8 – Mark 11

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- Read pages 219 - 234 of *The Gospel of Mark* by Mary Healy.
- Read carefully and prayerfully Chapter 11 of the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB) on the Gospel of Mark.
- Review and answer study questions on Chapter 11 (page 56) of the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB) on the Gospel of Mark.