

Homily for the 10th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B

June 9, 2024

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Genesis 3:9-15 (God confronts Adam and Eve after their sin.)

Responsory: Psalm 130 (With the Lord there is mercy, and fullness of redemption.)

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 (The one who raised Jesus will raise us, too.)

Gospel: Mark 3:20-35 (Jesus is accused of possession by an unclean spirit.)

Today's gospel passage began with the words, "Jesus came home with his disciples." "Home," in this case, doesn't mean the house where he grew up in Nazareth. Mark is referring to the house of Peter and Andrew in *Capernaum*, which Jesus made his base of operations as he ministered throughout the region of Galilee. Capernaum, being a major city right on the Sea of Galilee, was a much more convenient location than Nazareth, a little village hidden away in the hill country. Capernaum is where Jesus first started to teach and work miracles, attracting both crowds of adoring followers and some very vocal critics. Throughout Galilee, people were sharing stories of the astonishing things that Jesus did in Capernaum, while others disparaged him as a false prophet or worse.

All of this praise and scorn directed at Jesus reached the ears of the folks back in Nazareth, about 20 miles away. And it caused a great deal of concern among Jesus' relatives, especially his *older male relatives*, who were responsible for keeping him in line. Jesus lived in a culture in which an individual's identity and reputation were closely tied to his family. Any honor or shame that came upon one member of a family was automatically shared by the entire clan. So, the older males in a family had to keep watch over their younger siblings, nephews and nieces, and cousins. They could not allow any of them to bring shame upon the family, lest they all suffer the same humiliation. When these older relatives of Jesus heard that he was making a spectacle of himself, leading some people to speculate that he was either mentally ill or possessed by a demon, they had to act. They intended to seize him, drag him back to their village, and put him to work making tables and chairs and such. He was a carpenter, after all, not a *prophet*! We know from Jesus' poor reception in Nazareth that the whole village regarded him as just an ordinary hillbilly like them. So, it would not be surprising if his relatives held a similar opinion of him.

Of course, the one relative who knew differently was his mother, Mary. (Presumably, Joseph was deceased by this time, or else he surely would have been involved in this plot to seize Jesus.) Mark says that Mary came to Capernaum with her relatives, but we don't know her intentions for that visit. Was she just trying to protect her boy from the harsh criticism that he was attracting, or did she have doubts about him, too? Even if Mary understood that Jesus was the Son of God, she may not have understood how Jesus was supposed to carry out his mission on earth. It's possible that she also feared that Jesus had gone off the rails somehow.

In this passage, Mark uses a favorite technique of his, embedding one story inside another with a similar theme. The passage begins and ends with Jesus' family trying to seize him, fearing that he's "out of his mind," and in between is a story about some scribes accusing

Jesus of being possessed by an unclean spirit. In those days, people didn't make a clear distinction between mental illness and demon possession. But the accusation by the religious leaders is much more serious, because they are claiming that Jesus and Satan are actually *working together*. They are saying that the spirit animating Jesus' actions is *not* a spirit of God, but an "unclean spirit" from Satan. As Jesus points out, this is the worst kind of blasphemy, for they are casting aspersions not just on him, but on the Holy Spirit itself.

Note that these scribes are not *local* rabbis from Galilee, but the "big guns" from Jerusalem. Yet, despite their great authority in religious matters, they don't attack Jesus directly. Instead, they spread nasty rumors about Jesus behind his back. We know this because Mark says that Jesus hears what they are doing and "summons" them to hear his answer to the false charges. *They* are the authorities, but *Jesus confronts them* in order to teach them a lesson about who he is and what he has come to do.

First, Jesus points out the absurdity of claiming that he casts out demons with the help of Satan. The demons are supposed to be Satan's minions. If Satan is at war with the members of his own household, then that house will not be able to stand. Nobody will need to confront Satan's power, because he's already finished. Unfortunately, that's not the case. The only way to rob Satan of his power is for someone *even more powerful* to enter his house, tie him up, and plunder his property, figuratively speaking. That's exactly what Jesus came to do. The Father sent him into the world to overcome the power of sin and death, ending their reign over the human race for good. All those amazing deeds that won Jesus such acclaim were signs that Satan's days were numbered. His kingdom was about to come to an end.

When the final showdown arrived, it looked as though Satan won and Jesus lost. Evildoers rejoiced and faithful disciples wept as Jesus hung lifeless on the cross. But then he came back to life and revealed the true purpose of his passion and death. He had taken all the sins of humanity upon himself so that all who believe in him would be able to turn to him and receive mercy. He had succumbed to death in order to *defeat* it, once and for all. But the victory was not his *alone*. As St. Paul explained to the Corinthians, "The one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also *with Jesus*." Jesus fought and won the battle for us, and now we get to share in his glory.

In fact, what Jesus offers us is more than the opportunity for mercy here in this life and heavenly glory in the next. He also invites us to be one with him, in a relationship of love and intimacy. As his relatives waited outside the house in Capernaum, hoping to get hold of Jesus and talk some sense into him, he looked around at the people listening attentively to his teaching and said to them, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." He was telling them, and all of us, that we can be more than his disciples; we can be his *family*. We can be like brothers and sisters to him, and we can also bring him forth into the world, like a mother giving birth to him. We can share in his life and rejoice in his love, now and for all eternity.