

GOSPEL

MARK 1:29-39

On leaving the synagogue, Jesus went with James and John straight to the house of Simon and Andrew. Now Simon's mother-in-law had gone to bed with fever, and they told him about her straightaway. He went to her, took her by the hand and helped her up. And the fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were sick and those who were possessed by devils. The whole town came crowding round the door, and he cured many who were suffering from diseases of one kind or another; he also cast out many devils, but he would not allow them to speak, because they knew who he was.

In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there. Simon and his companions set out in search of him, and when they found him they said, 'Everybody is looking for you.' He answered, 'Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring country towns, so that I can preach there too, because that is why I came.' And he went all through Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out devils.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

This Sunday's Gospel reading continues the narrative of Jesus' day in Capernaum, on a Saturday, the Jewish weekly holy day. This time the Evangelist Mark highlights the relationship between Jesus' thaumaturgical work and the awakening of faith in the people he meets. Indeed, with the healing signs that he performs on all types of sick people, the Lord wants to arouse faith as a response.

Jesus' day in Capernaum begins with the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and ends with the scene of a crowd of townspeople who gathered outside the house where he was staying, to bring all the sick people to him. Marked by physical suffering and by spiritual wretchedness, the crowd comprises, so to speak, "the living environment" in which Jesus' mission, made up of

healing and comforting words and actions, takes place. Jesus did not come to bring salvation in a laboratory; he does not preach from a laboratory, detached from people. He is in the midst of the crowd! In the midst of the people! Just think that most of Jesus' public ministry took place on the streets, among the people; to preach the Gospel, to heal physical and spiritual wounds. This crowd of which the Gospel often speaks is a humanity marked by suffering. It is a humanity marked by suffering, toil and problems. It is to this poor humanity that Jesus' powerful, liberating and renewing action is directed. That Saturday ends in this way, in the midst of the crowd until late in the evening. And what does Jesus do after that?

Before dawn the next day, he goes out of the town's gates unseen and withdraws to a secluded place to pray. Jesus prays. In this way, he removes even himself and his mission from a "triumphalist" view which misunderstands the meaning of miracles and of his charismatic power. Miracles, in fact, are "signs" which encourage faith as a response; signs which are always accompanied by words that enlighten; and, taken together, the signs and words arouse faith and conversion through the divine power of Christ's grace.

The conclusion of today's passage indicates that Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God finds its most rightful place on the streets. To the disciples who look for him in order to bring him back to the town — the disciples went to find him where he was praying and they wanted to bring him back to the town — what does Jesus answer? "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also". This was the journey of the Son of God and this will be the journey of his disciples. And it must be the journey of each Christian. The street, as the place for the Good News of the Gospel, places the mission of the Church under the sign of "going forth", of journeying, under the sign of "movement", and never of idleness.

May the Virgin Mary help us to be open to the voice of the Holy Spirit which

propels the Church to increasingly "pitch her tent" among the people, in order to bring to everyone the healing word of Jesus, the physician of souls and bodies.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Are you looking for Jesus? What does this mean for you in your life?
- Jesus' core relationship was with his Father, experienced in prayer. How might prayer and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit guide your decisions and actions? How might you lean more fully into such a relationship?
- Jesus' mission was lived out, in words and deeds, in the ordinariness of daily life? How might this reality challenge us in the way we live and speak about our faith and experience of Jesus?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.