

Tenth Sunday Year B

Sometimes the selection of Scripture passages to be read at a Sunday Mass have too much content for us to take in all at once. This Sunday is a case in point when besides the teachings presented in the first two Readings even the Gospel addresses at least three major subjects.

The last paragraph of the Gospel asks the question: who enjoys an intimate relationship with Jesus? To which the answer is *those who do the will of God*.

The middle section deals with the influence of the devil in our lives and how *the powers of evil must be, can be, and are now being brought into subjection*. It also teaches that *those who resist the forgiveness of God* - that is, his essential nature, or *Spirit* - will not be forgiven - because that is their choice. These lessons need elaboration to be fully understood.

And preceding them are the opening lines which tell us that the relatives of Jesus thought he was *out of his mind* and they needed to *take him in hand*. This too deserves some explanation.

Today let's attend only to that one issue - why they thought he was **crazy**.

One reason is because he had left a loving home and a flourishing business as a carpenter from which he could have made a steady income. He threw it all away to become an itinerant preacher. No sensible man, they must have been thinking, would leave caring parents and other relatives - and throw up a business where the money came in every week - to become a vagrant who had *no place to lay his head*.

Second, Jesus was obviously on the way to a head-on collision with the orthodox leaders of his day. There are certain people, always, who can do a man a great deal of harm, people on whose right side it is better to keep, people whose opposition can be very dangerous. No sensible man, they must have been thinking, would ever get up against the powers that be, because he would know that in any collision with them he would be bound to come off second best. No one could take on the Scribes and the Pharisees and orthodox community leaders and hope to get away with it.

Third, Jesus had newly started a little society of his own - and a very odd group it was. There were a few fishermen, a former tax collector, a fanatical nationalist, and some others who were obviously hoping to advance their own welfare. They were not the kind of people whom any man in his right mind would particularly want to know; certainly not the kind of people who would be any good to a man who was set on a career.

No sensible man, they must have been thinking, would pick a crowd of friends like that - they were not the kind of people a prudent or ambitious man would want to get mixed up with.

By his actions Jesus had made it clear that the three laws by which most men organise their lives meant nothing to him...

First, he had thrown away *security*. In point of fact the one thing that most people in this world want more than anything else is security. They want above all things a job and a position which is secure, and where there are as few material and financial risks as possible.

Second, he had thrown away *safety*. Most people tend at all times to play safe. They are more concerned with the safety of any course of action than with its moral quality, its rightness or wrongness. A course of action which involves risk is something from which they instinctively shrink.

Third, Jesus had shown himself utterly indifferent to *the verdict of society*. He had shown that he did not much care what men said about him. In point of fact, as H.G.Wells once remarked, for most people *the voice of their neighbours is louder than the voice of God*. 'What will people say?' is one of the first questions that most of us are in the habit of asking.

What appalled Jesus' kith and kin was the risks that he was taking, risks which, as they thought, no sensible man would take. And, of course, their anxieties were wholly reasonable.

But Jesus knew all the risks and he chose to take them, and that was the Way he would put before us in order to build up the Kingdom of God on the earth. It is the Way that all the Saints of history have chosen to go in his footsteps - risking everything to gain everything, being ready to die in order to come fully alive. It is the great adventure of the truly Christian life.

When I was a child we were inspired and motivated by such stories - of Jesus himself, and of the saints, martyrs, missionaries who were ready to leave home and wealth and social status in order to venture into the unknown. To unfurl one's sail, to catch the wind of the Spirit, and to be blown - God knew where - to carry the Gospel into strange and dark places, foreign lands, to face ridicule and rejection so as to give oneself in the service of the poor and needy.

We were visited in our schools and parishes by such people who had great tales to tell of struggle, heartache, opposition and achievement. They led exciting lives and we wanted to have the same, and also to know - as they seemed to - the presence and power of God at work on a daily basis.

Youthful idealism was addressed and a spirit of adventure evoked - and the outcome was priests, religious, sisters and brothers, and dedicated lay missionaries who left domestic 'comforts' and 'career prospects', marriage and family life, to go out into the world to save the suffering from oppression and neglect, poverty and injustice.

Maybe a reason why such vocations are decreasing these days is because the challenge is not being put to our young people to be 'crazy'. Rather they are being encouraged to seek 'security', 'safety', and social approval - after all, that is the 'sensible thing to do'. I wonder.