

THE CHRIST MYSTERY IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The second Gospel recounts many of the incidents in Jesus' life which were recorded in the first Gospel. Like Saint Matthew, Saint Mark tells of Jesus' early Galilean ministry, his teaching of the apostles on the way to Jerusalem, the fatal confrontation with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, his death in that city, and the report of his resurrection. What is missing in Mark are the stories of Jesus' infancy and the extended discourses containing the teaching of Jesus. The focus of the second Gospel is the dynamic person of Jesus rather than his teaching about the Church. Saint Mark provides vivid details about the incidents of Jesus' public life, details not found in the first Gospel. Jesus is presented as a mighty wonderworker in dramatic conflict with Satan and the forces of evil; through his suffering of their onslaughts he overcomes them to win life for mankind. While the absence of much of Jesus' teaching makes for a shorter Gospel, the vivid detail provided by Mark makes individual pericopes often much longer than their equivalents in Matthew. Mark highlights the emotions of Jesus and the drama of his interaction with men and women, friends and enemies. The commentary will focus on unique aspects of Mark's portrait of Jesus.

The "beginning" of the "Good News of Jesus Christ" (**1:1**) is the voice of John the Baptist in the desert, which Mark sees as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Mark has found a passage in which Israel's God promises to send his "messenger" before him to prepare a way before him (**1:2**). The prophecy is attributed to Isaiah but is in fact from Malachi (cited by Matthew in Matt 11:10); it will be followed immediately by the citation of Isa 40:3 found also in Matthew's parallel account (cf. Matt 3:3). Like Matthew, Mark has made a significant change in the text of Malachi: instead of having the messenger prepare a way before himself, God addresses a mysterious "you" before whom he is sending his messenger to prepare the way. God is sending a messenger before a figure distinct from himself yet representing himself. At the very start of the Gospel we are given a hint of the dual nature, divine and human, of Jesus, who will in some fashion be God's "way" on earth. The verses following the saying from Malachi indicate that the coming of God's messenger precedes the entry of God himself into the temple, where he will purify the Temple personnel so that a pure sacrifice may be offered, and will issue judgment upon sinners and oppressors (cf. Mal 3:1-5). Saint Mark is suggesting that the Jesus whom John precedes will effect a cleansing of God's people and establish justice on earth.

When Mark goes on to cite Isaiah's prophecy about the voice of one crying in the desert, the passage is weighted with his attribution of this voice to the "messenger" of God in Malachi. The phrase common to both prophets is "prepare the way" of the Lord (Isaiah) or of his representative (Mark's version of Malachi). For Isaiah this was the way by which Yahweh would lead his exiled people from Babylon across the desert to Israel and Jerusalem. In the New Testament citations of the passage it is not the way that is in the desert but the one calling on men to prepare the way. For all four Evangelists the passage is fulfilled in the

appearance of John the Baptist in the desert of Judah, calling for readiness for the coming of the Lord. Men are to “make straight the paths” of the Lord so that his entry into the world of men can be facilitated **(1:3)**. The Isaiah passage thus gives local concreteness (“desert”) to the Malachi prophecy, which in turn identifies the voice of the one crying as that of a messenger sent by God to prepare for his special intervention in the midst of his people.

Having given the “heavenly background” of John the Baptist, Mark now introduces him as appearing in the desert with a message. This “voice” is “proclaiming a baptism of repentance” **(1:4)**. Like a prophet John is calling on people to recognize their sin and to be sorry for it. He offers a concrete act by which they may signify this sorrow for sin and open themselves for divine forgiveness. Water had been used in the Old Testament for ritual purification (e.g., Exod 30:17-21, Lev 8:6, 11:32, 14:8-9, 15:5-18, Num 19:7-22), and the prophets had foretold the forgiveness of sin as a cleansing by water (cf. Ezek 36:25, Ps 51:4, 9). John preached not just “repentance” but a “baptism of repentance,” calling for the humility of submission to a public ritual. This washing with water did not yet confer the forgiveness of sins but gave tangible form to the desire and request for that forgiveness. It was a baptism that expressed the repentance that would be required if one was to receive the forgiveness of sins to be won by Jesus whom John was heralding. Jesus would take the ritual used by John and make it a vehicle not only of the sinner’s repentance but also of the divine forgiveness which Jesus would win for men by his death on the cross. Unlike Saint Matthew, who waited until the Last Supper to mention the “forgiveness of sins” as the purpose of Jesus’ Passion (cf. Matt 26:28), Saint Mark introduces the theme at the very beginning of the Gospel. For John the Baptist, repentance has become an urgent necessity since the forgiver of sins is at hand. John’s prophecy was effective since “all the Judean country and all Jerusalemites went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan river, confessing their sins” **(1:5)**.

John is described in terms that recall the prophet Elijah, who likewise had to confront the people of his day with their sins (cf. 1 Kgs 18:8, 21-22, 21:17-22). He is “clothed in camel’s hair with a leather belt around his loins”—Elijah was described as a “hairy man [dressed in a hair garment as in Matt 3:4?] and girded with a leather belt around his loins” (2 Kgs 1:8)—and eats locusts and wild honey, foods available in the desert **(1:6)**. John is totally given to his message, indulging in no bodily comforts (cf. Matt 11:8). For this reason he is depicted in Christian art as gaunt and ascetic. He models in his personal life the self-denial associated with the repentance he preaches.

Having given a synopsis of John’s message, an account of its effects, and a portrait of the prophet himself (the last two items in reverse order from Matthew’s account, cf. Matt 3:4-6), Mark now quotes his exact words. We know from verse 2 that John is sent by God in front of someone else who represents God. Now John “proclaims” (cf. v. 4) the coming of that person. He is one “more powerful” than John, who is not worthy to bend down to loosen the straps of his

sandals **(1:7)**; the expression underlines the humility of John and the utter uniqueness of Jesus more than Matthew's "to carry his sandals." John's water baptism symbolized the desire to be freed from one's sins. Jesus will perform a baptism that will confer the "holy spirit" **(1:8)**. Ezekiel had applied the image of "washing with clean water" to the cleansing "from all your defilement and all your idols" (Ezek 34:25), i.e., the forgiveness of sins (cf. v. 4) and also to the conferring of the spirit of God himself in the heart of his people to empower them to keep his laws (Ezek 34:27). This spirit of God is the "holy spirit," a term found only three times in the Old Testament (see on Matt 1:18). Jesus will confer this Spirit on believers by appropriating John's water baptism and making it the vehicle by which the divine spirit of forgiveness and regeneration will be brought to men (cf. Mark 16:16). In his own succinct way Mark has prepared us for the appearance of the remover of sin as powerfully as Saint Matthew did in the longer introductory chapters of his Gospel. A more than human figure is coming to unleash the power of the divine Spirit on mankind.

After this introduction there appears the very one of whom John was speaking. Jesus, mentioned in 1:1 as the principal figure of the gospel, comes from Nazareth in Galilee. To the reader's surprise this man who will baptize with the holy spirit is himself baptized by John in the Jordan **(1:9)**. In the light of what John has said about his baptism, this must mean that Jesus willingly accepts a share in human sin and in repentance for that sin. If he is to baptize it will be as one who has submitted to the human need for purification as if he were a sinner. He will "bear our sins," as was said of the suffering Servant in Isaiah (cf. Isa 53:6, 11-12), so that we will not be surprised two verses later when God addresses Jesus with the opening words of the first servant song (Isa 42:1). Immediately on coming up from the water, Jesus sees the heavens "torn open," a more forceful term than in the other gospels, echoing a plea expressed by the people near the end of the Book of Isaiah:

Oh, that you would tear the heavens open and come down—at your presence the mountains would melt, as fire sets brushwood alight, as fire causes water to boil—to make known your name to your enemies, and make the nations tremble at your Presence, working unexpected miracles such as no one has ever heard of before. (Isa 63:19-64:3a)

This description of the Lord's coming is like a program for the Gospel of Mark. Jesus then sees the spirit like a dove descending on him **(1:10)**. It is in humbling himself to receive baptism that he becomes the bearer of the spirit with which he is to baptize others (cf. vs. 8). At the same time a voice is heard from the heavens: "You are my son, the beloved; in you I am well pleased" **(1:11)**. Both spirit and voice come down from the heavens. The voice is that of the God of Israel, creator of heaven and earth, asserting that the man Jesus enjoys the status of his own son, as had each son of David who reigned on the throne of Judah (cf. Ps 2:7, 2 Sam 7:14). Jesus is proclaimed and introduced to the reader as true king of Israel and son of David. The voice accompanies the spirit of God which descends on Jesus to animate his ministry. In calling Jesus, the "beloved,"

the divine voice makes us think of Abraham, who was ready to sacrifice his “beloved son” Isaac (cf. Gen 22:2; the LXX also translates Hebrew “only” [son] in 22:2, 12, and 16 as *agapētos*, “beloved”). Jesus will be offered in sacrifice for the sins of men. The Father must give up to death the one whom he loves (cf. John 3:35, 17:23, 24, 26) so that his own saving plan might be accomplished. Through this son offered in sacrifice many children will be born into the family of God.

Finally, in declaring that he is “well-pleased” in Jesus, the Father identifies Jesus with the suffering servant of God in the prophecies of Isaiah, whom God addresses in the first of the servant oracles as “my servant, ...in whom my soul delights” (Isa 42:1a). The servant is to do the Father’s bidding in bearing the sins of men as we have seen (cf. on 1:10). The beloved Son pleases the Father by doing his will: he is son and servant at once. As the servant of Yahweh was to be the recipient of God’s spirit (Isa 42:1b), so Christ receives the Spirit at the very moment he is addressed in a phrase with which God addressed the servant. In this baptismal scene Jesus is thus authorized by God as his beloved and royal Son, empowered by the divine spirit, and commissioned as a sacrifice for the sins of men. Through his sacrifice he will reign over the people of God and establish justice on earth (cf. Isa 42:1, 3, 4, 53:11). The submission of Jesus to John’s baptism will give to the Church’s baptism the power to communicate to men the holiness and righteousness of Jesus.

Immediately the spirit “drives” Jesus into the desert (**1:12**). Mark’s verb is stronger than the passive verbs in Matthew and Luke: Jesus “was led up” (from the Jordan valley into the Judean highland, Matt 4:1), or simply “led” (Luke 4:1) to the desert by the Spirit. The spirit given at Jesus’ baptism has taken hold of him and leads him to a place of personal testing. His baptism has shown his sorrow for sin, but if he is truly to represent sinners he must experience in himself the struggle against sin in order to be fitted for his ministry. During his forty days in the desert he is tempted by Satan, prince of devils (**1:13a**), whose task is to dissuade him from his allegiance to his Father in heaven. Mark gives none of the details of the temptation found in Matthew and Luke. He contents himself with saying that Jesus in the desert was accompanied by wild beasts and served by angels (**1:13b**). One would expect the wild animals of the desert to be threatening and hostile, but Jesus seems to be at home with them. Perhaps he represents the new Adam, living in harmony with the animals like the first Adam before the fall (cf. Gen 2:19-20). Just as the lower order of creation respects him so the purely spiritual creatures make themselves his servants, ministering to him. Christ is the central focus of all creation. The angels desire only to know his mystery (cf. 1 Pet 1:12). We are not told by Mark that Jesus triumphed over Satan’s temptations; Mark implies that the beloved son of God, filled with the Spirit of God, dwelling in communion with the natural world and served by angels, cannot but triumph over the onslaughts of evil.

The end of Jesus’ forty days in the desert coincides with the arrest of John the Baptist by King Herod. It is now for Jesus to carry out the ministry which it was John’s task to herald. He returns from the Judean desert to Galilee whence

he had come (cf. 1:9). Like the prophet John, he has a proclamation (cf. 1:4, 7) to make **(1:14)**: his theme is the “good news [cf. 1:1] of God.” In his first words he proclaims that “the right time has come, and the kingdom of God is near”; to the twofold declaration corresponds a double imperative: “Repent and believe in the good news” **(1:15)**. Jesus is aware that in him God is making a definitive intervention in the history of his people, he is establishing his kingship over men. He will establish men in their right relation with God, a relationship of love, trust, and obedience. He, the new Adam, will effect the new creation, in which God and men will live in peaceful communion. All that will be required of men to enter this kingdom of God will be the sorrow for sin already preached by John (cf. 1:4) and an acceptance of the good news that Jesus will preach (1:15). Mark calls this act of accepting the good news preached by Jesus “believing.” The rest of the Gospel will unfold how the kingdom of God breaks into history in Jesus and how men do or do not respond to his invitation to believe.

The first to believe are fishermen. Passing along the sea of Galilee, Jesus sees Simon and his brother Andrew throwing nets into the sea **(1:16)**. Jesus immediately sees an analogy between the action of gathering in a netful of fish and gathering men into the kingdom of God. In a strikingly original pun he calls on them to “come after” him and he will make them into “fishers of men” (1:17). He is at once collecting his first disciples and making them his representatives in collecting other members for the kingdom. From the beginning of the Gospel the closest disciples of Jesus will play this double role of models of all Christian discipleship and leaders in the church he is founding. As for the command, “Come after me,” it is first of all an invitation to accompany him as he walks through the area to preach “the kingdom of God.” In the course of the Gospel it will be seen that Jesus is asking the disciples to imitate his way of life and particularly his patient suffering as the way to fullness of life in God’s kingdom. The compelling force of Jesus’ personality is shown by the immediate (cf. 1:10; “immediately” is a favorite word of Mark, found 41 times in his Gospel as opposed to 18 in Matthew, 7 in Luke, and 6 in John) response of the two brothers, who abandon their nets and follow Jesus **(1:18)**. They forsake their livelihood because something in this man speaks to their deepest longings, their desire for closeness to God. Later they will allude to the price they paid to follow Jesus (cf. 10:28), and Jesus will spell out the rewards of their choice (cf. 10:29-30). A bit further on, Jesus sees two more fishermen, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in their boat mending their nets **(1:19)**. At once (cf. v. 18) he calls them, and leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, they too follow after Jesus **(1:20)**. Men will leave not only their work but their family to become followers of this bringer of the kingdom of God.

Jesus soon arrives at Capernaum on the shore of the lake, and “immediately” (cf. v. 18) enters the synagogue on a sabbath day and teaches **(1:21)**. He takes on himself the status of a rabbi and speaks of the divine plan. Yet the congregation is astounded at his teaching, since he teaches them as one having authority and not as the scribes **(1:22)**. He tells what God’s word means

and perhaps how he fulfills it (cf. Luke 4:21-22), not what other men say is the meaning of God's word. He is able to speak from an inner familiarity with the mind of God whose Son he is. As Saint John will say so clearly, the Father has revealed the truth of his plan to his Son (cf. John 3:31, 35, 5:20, 8:40, 16:15). It is not just men who are impressed with Jesus' teaching. "And immediately," says Mark in his rough style, "there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, saying, 'Why do you meddle with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the holy one of God'" (**1:23-24**). The evil spirit who has power over the man is a demon or devil, one of the created spirits who rebelled against God (cf. 2 Pet 2:4, Jude 6) and whose archetype is Satan (cf. 1:13). Jesus' teaching has aroused this demon who feels the threat of divine power. It is the demon in the man who cries out, asking why Jesus is invading what he regards as his own territory. Jesus' first synagogue teaching has brought the true enemy of man and God into the light; the battle between Jesus and the demons is joined and will end only with the utter rout of the latter. The demon knows what the outcome is to be. He cannot help confessing the truth of Jesus' identity, calling him the "holy one of God," an appropriate term for one on whom has descended the "holy spirit," who has withstood the testing of Satan in the desert, and who speaks with the authority of God himself. Jesus is God's envoy for establishing holiness on earth; this he will do through his total obedience to the divine will. While the spirits recognize Jesus' identity immediately, it will take a longer period for men to make the same discovery.

Jesus rebukes the spirit, uttering only five words (in Greek) to the demon's seventeen: "Be quiet and come out of him" (**1:25**). The self-vaunting speech of the spirit must first be silenced, then his hold over the man be eliminated. If Jesus' words take effect, then Mark's assertion about the "power" of Jesus' teaching (1:22) will gain new meaning: Jesus' word can bring about what it expresses, like the word of God at the creation (cf. Gen 1:3, 6, etc., Ps 33:6, 9, 104:7) or at the Red Sea (cf. Ps 106:9, Isa 50:2, Nah 1:4). This in fact happens: convulsing the man and crying aloud in a loud voice, the unclean spirit comes out of the man (**1:26**). Mark highlights the dramatic exit of the demon, as he will again in the gospel (cf. 9:20, 26). Saint Matthew did not even tell the story of this exorcism but replaces it, as the first account of a miracle of Jesus, with the healing of the leper, which in Mark is found at the end of Chapter One. Mark calls attention to the startling manifestation of Jesus' power, while Matthew couples the story with the healing of the centurion's servant as a sign of Jesus' mission to both Jews and gentiles. Jesus for Saint Mark is primarily the victor over evil. All who witnessed the miracle are "astounded" (only here and in 10:24, 32 in the NT) and are immediately led to discuss what has happened, giving a neat summary of the event as told by Mark: "A new teaching with power: he both commands the unclean spirits and they obey him" (**1:27**). The observers put the simple facts into words and acknowledge implicitly that such an event has never taken place before; it is something "new." And the report of him (not just of the event)

immediately went out everywhere through the whole surrounding region of Galilee (**1:28**). In Jesus a power to cast out the evil that destroys men's lives has been unleashed in the world.

"And immediately" (cf. 1:23) leaving the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John (**1:29**). Jesus accepts the hospitality of the fishermen he has called to himself. Simon's mother-in-law is found lying in bed with a fever, "and immediately" they tell him about her (**1:30**); the one who can cast out evil spirits can surely heal the sick. Going up to her, Jesus raises her, taking her by the hand, and the fever leaves her, and she waits on them (**1:31**, "him" in Matthew). Jesus is more engaged with his companions and with the sick one than in the corresponding story in the first Gospel, where Jesus has a somewhat distant grandeur. His healing work is accomplished through vital bodily contact with men.

By the time the sun goes down that sabbath evening, the whole area has heard of the wonders worked by Jesus that day. They bring to him all the sick and those possessed by demons (**1:32**), representing the two categories of sufferers that Jesus has cured that day. Mark gives the vivid detail that the whole city came crowding around the door of Peter's house (**1:33**), a typical detail of the kind omitted by Matthew, who, typically, replaces it by applying to Jesus one of his key Old Testament citations. Jesus cures all those sick with various diseases and casts out the "demons" (= the unclean spirits of vv. 23, 26, 27), and he does not permit the demons to speak, since they know his identity (**1:34**; cf. 1:24). The sentence is a concise summary of the healing events of this first sabbath. Jesus seems to have learned from the speech of the unclean spirit in Capernaum that he must not allow these supernatural creatures to speak. He must "bind" their tongues before he can banish them (cf. 3:27). There is no equivalent in Matthew's Gospel for this silencing of the demons. In Mark's Gospel the chief adversary of Jesus is Satan and the host of demons under him.

Jesus must have received little sleep that night since "very early in the morning while it was still night" he "went out and went away" to a desert (cf. vv. 4, 13) place and there he prayed (**1:35**). The healer of the peoples, already besieged by throngs, wishes to recall the desert experience of intimacy with his Father (cf. 1:11-12 and Hos 2:16-17), since this intimacy is the source of his powerful ministry. Christian monks will imitate the Lord by devoting hours in the middle of the night to prayer. It is easier to focus on unseen realities when the things of earth cannot be seen. The night will also be a privileged time, as the desert is a privileged place, for combatting the "princes, the powers, the world-rulers of this darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens" (Eph 6:12; cf. Mark 14:34-38). And Jesus is "eagerly sought out" (only use of this word in the NT) by Simon and his companions (**1:36**), and they find him and tell him that everyone is seeking him (**1:37**; note Mark's fondness for the connective "and," which appears 77 times in Chapter One, over 50 of them as a conjunction introducing a clause; the usage seems to reflect the common Hebrew connective *wě-*). It is not Jesus who has initiated his healings but others who have drawn it

out of him (cf. 1:23-25, 30-31, 32-34). Jesus himself is more concerned to “proclaim” his message elsewhere into the neighboring (market-)towns (**1:38**); that is the reason why he has “come out” into Galilee. His mission is to announce the good news of God, the good news that a new dominion over Satan and evil is being established. He has come not to heal the bodies or even the spirits of men and women of his time and place but to announce the advent of the kingdom of God to be received by repentance for sins and faith in his person (cf. 1:15). The healing miracles will be signs inviting men to recognize that God is acting in him and inviting them to a personal surrender to his lordship with a view to receiving the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1:4, 8). Ultimately his gift will be not a few more years of earthly life but an everlasting life beyond death. This will only gradually be understood by his followers. In accordance with this sense of mission, Jesus moves on, proclaiming (cf. 1:4, 7, 14, 38) in their synagogues in the whole of Galilee and casting out demons (**1:39**). Mark’s formulation of these two activities shows how intimately connected they are: the message of the preaching is that Satan’s power is being overthrown; the expulsions of demons show that Jesus has the power to overcome Satan by destroying the human sin that is Satan’s greatest work (cf. Gen 3:1-5). For the moment it is not clear either that Jesus will achieve this victory only by dying or that man can only receive the fruits of that victory by faith. Jesus will insist on the latter reality in the first half of this Gospel and on the former truth in the second half.

The final episode of the first chapter returns to the theme of healing. Again Jesus does not initiate the miracle, but a leper comes to him exhorting him and kneeling, “saying to him that if you wish, you can cleanse me” (**1:40**). The passage is a good example of Mark’s habit of using the language of direct speech in an indirect construction, a feature usually eliminated in translation (cf. Vulgate, KJV, RSV, JB, NAB) but probably characteristic of colloquial usage. The Word of God took flesh in ordinary humanity. The same roughness is found in the following verse: “And taking pity, stretching out the hand he touched him and says [historical present] to him, ‘I do wish; be cleansed’” (**1:41**). The omission of conjunction and pronouns where we would expect them gives vigor to the speech. For the first time we see that Jesus’ ministry is rooted in compassion for the misery of men. He is moved by the horror of a disease that arouses the repugnance of men and confers social ostracism. The leper has heard the reports of Jesus’ cures (cf. 1:28) and does not hesitate to seek his own healing. Jesus touches him just as he took the hand of Peter’s mother-in-law (cf. 1:31). Throughout the Gospel of Mark it is the touch of Jesus’ body that heals (cf. 3:10, 5:27-29, 41, 6:56, 7:33, 8:22-25, 9:27). Here the touch is accompanied by a word of promise and a word of command. “And immediately” (cf. 1:10, 12, 18, 20, 21, 23, 29, 30) the leprosy “went away from him” (see the similar expression of 1:26 and also 1:31) and he is cleansed (**1:42**). There may be an echo here of the “uncleanness” of the spirit in the first miracle in the synagogue (cf. 1:23, 26, 27);

both physical and spiritual uncleanness keep one from God and Jesus can overcome both.

Having expressed compassion for the leper Jesus now shows another deep feeling which “boils over to” the man [cf. Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 188]: sternly warning him, he immediately drove him away (**1:43**). The strong feeling of Jesus can be explained by his anger at the suffering caused by Satan’s hold over man and by his desire that his healing action not be interpreted as a mere physical healing (cf. on v. 38). As he commanded the demons to be silent (cf. 1:25, 34), he now enjoins silence on the healed man, directing him only to go and show himself to the priest (cf. Lev 13:49) and to offer for his cleansing what Moses prescribed (see the elaborate rites of Lev 14:2-32) as a “witness to them” (**1:44**). Jesus knows the Mosaic Law, given by his Father, and will obey it. The healed man will reveal to the priests both the divine power of Jesus and Jesus’ conformity with Israel’s Law. Jesus is seen to be both Lawgiver and subject (cf. Gal 4:4). But the healed man goes out and begins to proclaim (cf. 1:39) much and “spread the report widely” (cf. Matt 9:31) so that Jesus can no longer go openly into a city but stays without in desert places, and there people come to him “from everywhere” (**1:45**; cf. 1:28).

Despite what Mark has said about Jesus not being able to enter the cities, we find him after a few days again at Capernaum (**2:1**) where it is learned that he is in the house (Peter’s?, cf. 1:29). As before, many are gathered together so that there is no longer any room even around the door (cf. 1:33; detail not found in Matthew, like many others in this story), and Jesus speaks to them “the word” (**2:2**), that is, the call to conversion in the light of the inbreaking of God’s kingdom (cf. 1:15). A paralyzed man is brought (cf. 1:32) to him for healing, carried by four men (detail not in Matthew; **2:3**). Being unable to bring [the man] to Jesus through the crowd, they resort to removing the [mud?] roof where he is, and “digging [it] out” they lower the pallet on which the paralytic is lying—a vivid detail entirely absent in Matthew (**2:4**). For Jesus the persistence and ingenuity of the bearers is a sign of their conviction of the power and will of Jesus to heal, a conviction which he calls faith. This was the response to his message that Jesus called for at the outset of the ministry (cf. 1:15). The faith he demands is not deterred by obstacles, and it can be exercised on behalf of another as well as for oneself. In line with his sense of mission (cf. on 1:38) Jesus responds to the men’s faith by offering the paralytic the forgiveness of his sins (**2:5**). He is giving the man not the healing he seeks but the deeper healing that he and all men need and which will be won for the world by his death (cf. 10:45). Some scribes (experts in the Law, cf. 1:22) were sitting there (Mark only) and pondering in their hearts (**2:6**), “Why does this man speak like this? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins except God alone?” (**2:7**). These theologians rightly understand that Jesus is assuming divine power, which for a mere man would constitute blasphemy, an attack by man on the rights of God. The only way these men might have been able to accept Jesus would be to face the obvious fact that Jesus was exercising divine power in his healings and exorcisms, in his “teaching

with power” (cf. 1:27). It will soon appear that they do not choose this option. “And immediately,” knowing in his spirit that they are pondering in this way in themselves, Jesus asks them why (matching the “why” of the scribes, v. 6) they ponder these things in their hearts **(2:8)**. The repetitions in verses 6 through 8 give evidence of ordinary speech; Matthew’s account is more streamlined. Jesus’ knowledge of men’s thoughts is yet another indication of his divinity. He now brings to light the logical connection between the power to heal and the power to forgive by asking the scribes whether it is easier to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Rise and take up your pallet and walk” **(2:9)**. If Jesus is able to perform the divine action that has visible results, then he must have the power to perform divine actions that cannot be seen, such as the forgiveness of sins. In order to prove that the “Son of Man” (first use of this title in Mark; see on Matt 8:20) has power to forgive sins on earth, he says to the paralytic **(2:10)**, “I tell you, rise, take up your pallet and go to your house” **(2:11)**. When the man rises, and immediately takes up his pallet and leaves in front of all, they are all amazed and glorify God, “saying that we have never seen [anything] like this” **(2:12)**; same construction as in 1:40; cf. also 1:37). The crowds are open to the uniqueness of Jesus’ authority in the way that the scribes are not. Still today Jesus attracts believers for the reason given by the crowds: no one has ever seen anyone else act like this (cf. John 7:46).

Jesus goes out again along the sea, and all the crowd come to him, and he “teaches” them **(2:13)**, cf. 1:21-22). Along the way he sees Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office and says to him, “Follow me,” the equivalent of the “come after me” addressed to the first two disciples (cf. 1:17, 18). And getting up he follows him **(2:14)**. Jesus’ recruiting of a member of a notoriously sinful profession, like his claim to be able to forgive sin, is another affront to the upholders of pure religion. The episode is introduced here to prepare for the officials’ attack on Jesus’ association with sinners.

Jesus accepts Levi’s hospitality and dines at his house where many tax collectors and sinners recline with Jesus and his disciples, “for they were many and they followed him” **(2:15)**; conversational idiom). To follow Jesus is to let oneself be taught by him, to love and obey him. The scribes (cf. 2:6), identified for the first time in the Gospel as belonging to the Pharisee party, observing that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors, inquired of his disciples why he was eating with tax collectors and sinners **(2:16)**; repetition as in 2:6-8; the question corresponds to that of 2:7). A good Jew was one who would avoid association with sinners lest he be contaminated by them or seem to condone their way of life (cf. Pss 1:1, 26:4-5, 101:3-7, 141:4-5, Prov 1:10-15). Overhearing the question of the scribes, Jesus undertakes to give the answer: it is not those in good health who need a doctor but the sick **(2:17a)**. Far from being seduced by the sinners, Jesus is seducing them to goodness. He is supplying the divine love and mercy which will enable them to turn from their sin and live virtuously. He is a physician of souls, not just bodies. Those who follow him have responded to the voice of God appealing to them through his works, which demonstrate the power,

goodness, and compassion of God. Their experience of Jesus' love for them empowers them to leave sin and turn to God. That is the purpose of his "coming," whether this verb refers to his coming to the cities of Galilee or his coming into the world from God. He has not come "to call [cf. 1:20] the just but sinners" **(2:17b)**, as has already been indicated several times in this Gospel (cf. 1:4, 15, 2:5, 10). In fact, all men are sinners (cf. Rom 3:20, 23); the "just" in this saying of Jesus are those who think themselves just, who pride themselves on obeying the Law and feel no need of divine grace for the fulfilling of the Law. The overwhelming and condescending mercy of God in Jesus is what frees men to recognize their sin because they know it is forgiven. This "convicting" of the world of its sin will be continued in Jesus' Church by the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:8). It is God's most merciful act because it opens a man to the gift of healing and redemption. In the Pharisees Jesus will meet a wall of resistance to this "convicting" of sin, a hardening of heart that is the temptation of every man and for which we must beg forgiveness. The difference between the sin of the Pharisees and that of the sinners who flock to Jesus is that the sins of the former are interior and unseen, hidden behind a veil of propriety (cf. the "hypocrisy" denounced by Jesus in Matt 23:23-28; also John 5:44), while those of the latter are open and impossible to deny. The task of the "righteous" man is to take his place with sinners at the table of Jesus.

New questions arise for Jesus. An unknown "they" approach him to ask why the disciples of John and those of the Pharisees fast, but Jesus' disciples do not fast **(2:18)**. The only fast required by the Law was that of the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev 23: 27, 29, 32), but during and after the Exile other fasts are noted (cf. Zech 7:3, 5, 8:19, Isa 58:3-6). Fasting was a manifestation of sorrow for sin and an opening of the heart to God's mercy. According to the other Synoptics Jesus fasted forty days in the desert, but Saint Mark does not mention this fast in his account of the temptation in the desert. It seems that religious Jews like the Pharisees and the followers of the Baptist valued fasting as a religious observance and thought that a religious leader like Jesus ought to do the same. Jesus concurs in their esteem for fasting but his justification for his disciples' not fasting is a shocking distinction between himself and all other religious figures. He presents himself as the "bridegroom" of Israel, the image used for God himself in the prophets (cf. Hos 2:16-22, Isa 54:4-8, 62:4-5, Ezek 16:8). In one more way Jesus is identifying himself with Yahweh. He says that surely the "sons of the bridal chamber," that is, the attendants of the bridegroom (cf. "sons of Zion" in Ps 149:2 and "sons of the citadel" in 1 Macc 4:2), cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them. As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast **(2:19)**; repetition as in 2:16, not present in Matt 9:15). The wedding between God and his people calls for a banquet, not fasting. Yet Jesus knows of a time when he will be "taken away" from his disciples, a possible allusion to the Servant of the Lord (cf. Isa 53:8) and therefore to his coming suffering and death (cf. on 1:11). This will be the day for his followers to fast **(2:20)**. The Lord will indeed be dwelling among them but hidden, to be manifest

at the final judgment (cf. Matt 25:1, Rev 19:7-9, 21:9). In the meantime fasting will be a sign of repentance or mourning (in fact the parallel passage to 2:19, Matt 9:15, has “mourning” in place of Mark’s “fasting”). The Christian lives in the joy of the Lord’s resurrection while suffering until his full share in that resurrection (cf. Rom 8:23-25, 2 Cor 5:2-10).

Understanding how difficult it must be for the religious experts to grasp how a mortal man could identify himself with Yahweh without blasphemy (cf. the charge in 2:7), Jesus gives two images to explain how a new and amazing truth requires a corresponding change in human understanding. If one sews a patch of new (unshrunk) cloth onto an old garment, the new patch simply takes [something] away from the old cloth and makes a worse rent (**2:21**). Human patterns of thinking will not serve to accommodate the revolutionary truth that God has appeared in human flesh. A person has to allow his tidy logic to be disrupted by the inbreaking of a new kind of truth, a personal experience of the divine in a man. It is a matter of God’s ways being above human ways (cf. Isa 55:8-9). It is the part of a creature to be open to the voice of his Creator when this voice comes with the ring of authority. The experience of God in Jesus will entail a restructuring of human thought no longer based on reason alone but on the experience of the divine in Jesus which both fulfills and transcends all human thought, lifting it onto a new level. Nothing but a surrender of their old categories will enable the Pharisees to experience Jesus as God, a surrender which Nicodemus was able to make (cf. John 3:1-2, 7:50-51, 19:39).

In his second example of incompatibility between old and new, Jesus identifies himself as fresh (still fermenting) wine which if placed in old wineskins will burst them so that both wine and skins are lost (**2:21**). One may associate the wine with that of the banquet promised for the final times by Isaiah, who connected the banquet with the destruction of death and the salvation of Zion (cf. Isa 25:6-10). Fresh wine must be stored in new skins. The image of wine fits well with the subject of the bridegroom (cf. vs. 19), as wine would be a major feature of the wedding feast. In the Gospel of John it is at a wedding that Christ provides a wine miraculously made, symbol of the divine love with which he comes to inebriate his people (John 2:1-10).

By now the Pharisees are on the watch for further irreligious behavior on the part of Jesus. On a sabbath day they observe him walking through grain fields while the disciples who walk with him pluck heads of wheat (**2:23**). Since according to rabbinic law the picking of grain and the subsequent rubbing to remove the husk constituted work and was therefore prohibited on the sabbath, the Pharisees say to Jesus: “Look, what they are doing on the sabbath is not permitted” (**2:24**). The question corresponds to those of 2:7, 16, and 18. Observation of the sabbath was one of the ten commandments (cf. Exod 20:8-11, 31:12-17, 35:1-3, Deut 5:12-15) and was a primary factor of Jewish observance from the time of the Exile (cf. Ezek 20:12-13, 20-21, Isa 56:2, 4, 6, 58:13-14, Lev 23:3, Num 15:32-36, Neh 13:15-22 etc.). The Pharisees had specified in great detail how this commandment was to be kept and what kinds of “work” were

prohibited. In the Lord's eyes they were substituting "doctrines of men" for the "doctrines of God" (cf. Matt 15: 6, 9). But here Jesus does not denounce the Pharisaic casuistry but answers the question Christologically, that is, with a reference to his person as transcending the Law. He identifies himself with David, Israel's ideal king and bearer of the promise of an eternal dynasty, who on a day when he and his men were hungry and needed food **(2:25)** entered the dwelling (i.e., the tent) of God when Abiathar was chief priest and ate the loaves of presentation (cf. Lev 24:5-9) which no one but the priests were to eat and gave [them] also to his companions **(2:26)**; cf. 1 Sam 21:2-7, where the priest is Ahimelech). Jesus assumes that what was permissible for David is permissible also for the Son of David, who he is in virtue of the title "my Son" given him by God at his Baptism (cf. on 1:11). As he has claimed to be the forgiver of sin, the physician of sinners, and the bridegroom of Israel, he now assumes the identity of Israel's Messiah, the anointed son of David expected by Jews of the time as the bringer of salvation (see the beginning of this expectation of an anointed one in Dan 9:25). As God's anointed he has the right to decide how God's Law, particularly its religious observances, is to be applied. As before (cf. 2:9, 19) Jesus gives the teaching in the form of a question whose answer is easily inferred. The human need of God's anointed one takes precedence over ritual regulations. Jesus can demand this privilege because the law of the sabbath was made to benefit men in their relation to God. It was God's will that his anointed be nourished rather than starve because of a religious regulation. In that sense the sabbath needed to be regarded as "for man," not man for the sabbath **(2:27)**. Jesus, as Son of Man (cf. 2:10), can call himself "master of the sabbath" **(2:28)** because he has come to purify man's heart for that union with God which is the true end of the Law and its observances. The mistake of the Pharisees was to forget the purpose of the Law and to see mere external conformity to its precepts as constituting true religion. The danger of the Pharisaic attitude is that it fosters the illusion that one is holy if he carries out certain easily verifiable practices.

Unwilling to accept Jesus' attitude toward the sabbath, the Pharisees now watch for further violations of it. On a sabbath when Jesus is again in the synagogue (cf. 1:21, 39), a man with a withered hand is also present **(3:1)**. They (presumably the Pharisees of the previous story, cf. 2:24) watch him carefully to see if he will heal the man on the sabbath, thus giving them something to accuse him of **(3:2)**. The act of healing would count as work and violate the sabbath observance. Jesus prepares for the miracle by summoning the man with the withered hand to stand in the middle **(3:3)**; detail missing in Matthew's account). He then makes his point with a question (cf. 2:9, 19, 25): does the sabbath permit one to do a good deed or to do a bad one, to save (first appearance of this word in the Gospel) a soul or to kill **(3:4a)**? It is difficult to see how a God who is compassionate could legislate against the performance of a good work and in particular a life-giving act. The sabbath law was intended to exclude not good deeds but evil deeds and work leading to self-aggrandizement (cf. Isa 58:13-14, Jer 17:21-27). In fact, if the sabbath was to be a participation in God's own "rest"

(cf. Gen 2:3, Exod 20:10-11, Heb 4:9-10) and God is “compassion and love” (cf. Pss 103:3-5, 8, 145:8-9), then it would be natural for a man to practice God’s compassion in deeds on the sabbath. The divine rest is not inactivity but the intense love that is behind, but not exhausted by all his “works” (cf. John 5:17-18) and that is the true goal of man. To share God’s “rest” is to love as he loves.

The Pharisees remain silent at Jesus’ question **(3:4b)**. Their unwillingness to recognize goodness when it does not conform to their preconceptions evokes from him a passionate outburst. Mark gives the vivid details. “Looking around on them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, he said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it, and his hand was restored” **(3:5)**. Here if anywhere we have the keynotes of Mark’s portrayal of Jesus: the detail of Jesus’ looking around at his hostile audience, his emotions of both anger and grief, his diagnosis of hardness of heart. The dramatic conflict is intense, utterly different in tone from Matthew’s account which instead gives a substantial teaching of Jesus on this occasion (cf. Matt 12:11-12). Jesus’ anger and grief are those of the God of Israel who loves his people and is unable to save them unless they recognize their need (cf. Zech 1:2-6, Isa 65:1-7, Ps 81:12-16). The terse account of the healing leaves a stark effect. Leaving the synagogue, the Pharisees immediately join the partisans of King Herod in taking counsel against Jesus in order that they might destroy him **(3:6)**. The opposition of the Pharisee scribes that first appeared at the beginning of Chapter Two has hardened into a firm resolution to eliminate this lawbreaker.

Five conflict stories of roughly the same length have led up to this decision. (In Matthew the first three stories are separated from the last two by other miracle stories [Matt 9:18-38], by Jesus’ long discourse to the apostles [Matt 10], and by a good deal of material about the reception accorded to John the Baptist and Jesus [Matt 11]. Now Saint Mark will give in summary fashion the relationship to Jesus of five different groups. As Jesus goes with his disciples toward the Sea of Galilee, a great multitude from Galilee follow him (cf. 1:45); and from Judea **(3:7)**, from Jerusalem and from Idumaea and beyond the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, hearing of his deeds, come to him **(3:8)**; note repetition). Jesus is the center of a circle widening to the west, the south, the east, and the north. He has to tell his disciples to have a boat ready for him lest he be “crushed” by the crowd **(3:9)**. The verb, peculiar to Mark among the Gospels, calls attention of the immersion of the Marcan Jesus in everyday humanity. His Jesus is constantly rubbing shoulders with the crowds as one of them, unlike the Jesus of Matthew who is somewhat above his surroundings and is often prostrated to. This is the “halo” effect depicted in music by the string quartet which accompanies the words of Jesus in Bach’s *Saint Matthew Passion*. As Jesus cures many people, the contact with the crowds becomes almost dangerous, as people “fall on” him so that those with afflictions might touch him **(3:10)**.

Since some of the miracles of Jesus are exorcisms, the next group of those whose reactions to Jesus are described are the unclean spirits who, when

they see him, fall before him and cry out, “You are the son of God” **(3:11)**. Like the demon in the synagogue at Capernaum who identified Jesus as “the holy one of God,” these demons recognize the one who is to put their dominion to an end. They see what the disciples have not yet grasped, that Jesus is the Davidic king destined to establish God’s reign in Israel (cf. 1:11). As in the earlier episode, Jesus must “rebuke” (cf. 1:25) these spirits not to make him known **(3:12; cf. also 1:34)**. Although the term “son of God” is accurate, both as a designation of the Messianic King and in the profounder sense as the title of one generated by God himself, Jesus is wary of a title that could too easily be understood in a purely political sense. In any case, the shouts of the demons contribute to the sense of “hurly-burly” that surrounds the Marcan Jesus.

At this point Jesus ascends a mountain and calls to him those whom he wishes, and they come to him **(3:13)**. His purpose in ascending the mountain is not to give a discourse, as in Matthew (cf. Matt 5:1-2), but to “make twelve” who might be “with him” (phrase omitted in the parallel Synoptic accounts but characteristic of Mark’s emphasis on human contact with Jesus) and whom he might “send” (*apostellein*) to proclaim **(3:14; cf. 1:14, 38-39)** and to have power to cast out demons **(3:14)**. The two functions are those of Jesus himself (cf. 1:27). A strong manuscript tradition repeats here the words “and he made them twelve” **(3:16a)**, which would form an inclusion with vs. 14a, enclosing the description of the apostles’ functions. Jesus gives Simon the name Peter **(3:16b)**; the names of the rest of the apostles follow as if they were the objects of the verb “made”: James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (cf. 1:19), and he gave them the name “Boanerges,” that is, “sons of thunder” **(3:17)**; and Andrew (separated from his brother) and Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas and James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus and Simon the Canaanite **(3:18)** and Judas Iscariot, who also handed him over **(3:19)**. To the Pharisees now plotting against Jesus will be added one of Jesus’ own inner circle. He is destined to be rejected by friend and foe. The Twelve will not begin actively carrying out their mission until sent by Jesus in 6:7. For the moment they still have much to learn from their master.

Back in the town Jesus enters a house and is so besieged by the crowd that he and his disciples cannot even eat bread **(3:20)**. Jesus’ relatives hear of this and come to take hold of him, saying that he has lost his senses **(3:21)**. Those closest to Jesus by birth do not understand him even while they wish to protect him. The Son of God endures human alienation even from loved ones.

The scribes who have come down from Jerusalem now pronounce their verdict: Jesus is possessed by the demon Bezebul (originally the name of a Philistine deity of uncertain meaning, mockingly converted by Hebrews into “lord of flies” or “lord of dung”), and he casts out demons by [the power of] the prince of demons **(3:22)**. The irony of demons fighting against demons does not seem to have occurred to these experts but is immediately picked up by Jesus, who calls them together and speaks to them in parables **(3:23a)**, announcing a form of teaching that will become the theme of Chapter Four). Jesus opens his response

to the charge, characteristically, with a question (cf. 2:9, 19, 25-26, 3:4): How can Satan cast out Satan (**3:23b**)? The Greek word order emphasizes the irony: “How can Satan Satan dispel?” Jesus equates the demon Bezebul with the Satan who tested him in the wilderness (cf. 1:13). He then makes the point in general terms: if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand (**3:24**); it will destroy itself from within. Similarly if a house is divided against itself that house will not be able to stand (**3:25**). The principle is then applied specifically to Satan; if he rises up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand but will come to an end (**3:26**). It is undeniable that Jesus has released many people from control by demons—even the scribes acknowledge the fact. Why would Satan destroy his own empire? Jesus advances the argument further: if Satan is being dispossessed of the men and women he held captive, that must be because his power is being curtailed by one stronger than he. No one can enter a strong man’s house to burgle his possessions unless he first binds the strong man, and then he burgles his house (**3:27**). The liberation of men from Satan’s thrall is a sign that his power to destroy men is at an end. Finally, Jesus addresses the root cause of the scribes’ accusation: they do not wish to acknowledge that divine actions have been performed in their midst since they would then have to confess Jesus’ lordship. Jesus solemnly declares that all things will be forgiven the sons of men (cf. 2:5, 10), sins and blasphemies, whatever things they blaspheme (**3:28**); but whoever blasphemes against the holy spirit will never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin (**3:29**). The holy spirit is the spirit of God with which Jesus has been endowed (1:10) and who works in the exorcisms Jesus performs. To deny this divine power is to reject God’s offer of forgiveness which would restore a person to divine friendship. God cannot forgive a sin of which a man does not wish to be forgiven. All this is Jesus’ reply to the accusation that he was possessed by an “unclean spirit” (the equivalent of “Beezebul,” “Satan,” and the “prince of demons”; cf. 1:23, 26; **3:30**). The scribes are prepared neither to “repent” nor to “believe” (cf. 1:15). Their sin is the same as that of Adam and Eve, the decision not to submit to the goodness of the Creator but to assert their rebellious independence, to decide what is good and evil.

Mark has told of how Jesus’ “relatives” thought he was out of his mind (cf. 3:21). Now he reports that his mother and his brothers come and standing outside (the house of 3:20?) send to him to summon him (**3:31**; less polished language than Matt 12:46). They understandably feel they have a certain claim on Jesus, the claim of family that Jesus will later teach is transcended in the kingdom of God (cf. 10:29-30). When Jesus receives the message a crowd is seated around him and he is told, “Look, your mother and your brothers and your sisters are outside seeking you” (**3:32**). Jesus responds with a question (cf. most recently 3:23): “Who are my mother and my brothers?” (**3:33**). In a typically Marcan detail, “Looking around [cf. 3:5] at those seated in a circle around him,” Jesus says, “See my mother and my brothers” (**3:34**). Jesus creates a family of those who listen to him willingly (cf. Luke 10:39), who are thereby “doing the will

of God" **(3:35)**. As Saint John will say clearly, it is the will of God that men come to Jesus and hear him and be taught by him (cf. John 6:40, 45). Mark will not use the word "church" but in this pericope he gives a picture of the spiritual relationships that make up the church: the teaching of Jesus and its eager reception by men and women. These hearers of the word will be described in parable form in the following chapter. They are in marked contrast to the scribes who reject the teaching and person of Jesus (cf. the preceding pericope). Already Jesus is the occasion of the division of men into "sheep" and "goats" (cf. Matt 25:32-33). The parables of the following chapter will provide a spiritual understanding of what is happening in the varying responses of men and women to his preaching.

Again Jesus began to teach by the sea, and there gathered with him so numerous a crowd that getting into the boat (cf. 3:9) he sat on the sea and all the crowd were by the sea on the land **(4:1)**; Matthew manages to say this with only one mention of the word "sea," cf. Matt 13:1-2). Jesus will teach "many things" by the parable method initiated in 3:23-25, 27 **(4:2a)**. In the course of his teaching he told them **(4:2b)** to listen to a story about a sower who went out to sow **(4:3)**. The wording of the parable **(4:4-9)** differs little from Matthew's version (Matt 13:4-9); Mark is more descriptive about seed on good soil that gives fruit "coming up and growing and bears thirtyfold," etc. (4:8). The concluding exhortation to "listen" matches that at the beginning of the parable (cf. 4:3). Jesus intends the hearers to think about the purport of the parable. When next he is alone, those around him with the twelve question him about the "parables" **(4:10)**; the plural is the better reading). Jesus explains that to his followers is given "the mystery of the kingdom of God," but to those "outside" everything comes in parables **(4:11)**. One well disposed to Jesus will understand the "mystery" that is the hidden reality of God's relations with men; those not open to the message will find the parables an obscure curtain they cannot get beyond. As in the first Gospel, Mark has Jesus quote the prophet Isaiah but in much truncated form **(4:12)**: from Isaiah 6:9 come the phrases about seeing without perceiving and hearing without understanding (in reverse order) and from Isaiah 6:10 only the final statement about not turning back and being "forgiven" (replacing Isaiah's "healed"). Before explaining the parable of the sower Jesus gently admonishes the disciples about their lack of understanding: if they can't understand this parable how will they understand any of the parables? **(4:13)**.

If Mark's telling of the parable of the sower is substantially the same as Matthew's, the interpretation recorded by the two evangelists differs considerably. In Matthew the explanation of the parable is in terms of the one "sowing"; in Mark it is more naturally in terms of the seed. In Mark Jesus explains that the seed is the "word" **(4:14)**, presumably of his teaching (cf. 1:22, 27, 4:2), while in Matthew the identification is simply assumed (cf. Matt 13:19). Mark begins by identifying the first group of seeds: these are those by the wayside where the word is sown, and when they have heard, immediately comes Satan and takes away the word sown in them **(4:15)**. The explanation is a nice mixture

of the literal and the figurative (“word sown”). These likewise are the ones sown on rocky ground, who when they have heard the word immediately receive it with joy **(4:16)** and do not have any root in themselves but last only for a time, then when affliction or persecution comes because of the word they immediately fall away **(4:17)**; this wording follows that of Matthew but in the plural). Others are those sown among thorns; these are those who hear the word **(4:18)**, and worries of the present age and the lure of wealth and desires for other things coming upon them stifle the word and it does not bear fruit **(4:19)**. And these are those sown on good ground, who hear the word and take it in and bear fruit thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold **(4:20)**. Man must learn that the message he has received from God in Jesus can be assailed by Satan, by persecution, by worldly attractions; it can only produce its intended fruit if man clings to it as his highest priority.

Before recounting two more parables concerning seed, Jesus gives two other parables separated by a form of the saying about having ears to hear **(4:23)**; cf. 4:9) and each consisting of two parts. The first is about a lamp and is presented as a double question: Surely a lamp is not brought in order to be placed under a peck or under the bed? Is it not to be placed on the lampstand? **(4:21)**. The meaning is given in the following double statement: there is nothing secret that shall not be made known; nothing is kept hidden except to be brought into the open **(4:22)**. The parable of the sower was about what is happening “behind the scenes,” as the seeds do or do not germinate in their respective soils; the fruit or lack of it only appears later. Jesus is telling his followers that a sincere adherence to him and his message in one’s heart will inevitably produce results: it cannot be kept hidden. In addition to being a seed the word is a light that will illumine earthly existence; it will show itself in good behavior and joy. After the reminder about having ears to hear, Jesus introduces the next parable with a similar warning that borrows verbs from the Isaiah passage cited earlier (cf. 4:12): “See how you hear.” This parable focuses more on man’s reception of the word. “In what measure you measure, it will be measured to you and added” **(4:24)**. There is a proportion between the generosity with which one welcomes the word and the benefits one receives from it. The second part of the parable makes the point more cryptically and more starkly: whoever has, it will be given to him; and whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him **(4:25)**. “Has” must here be taken to mean “has received,” and the “what” one has is the word of God. If the word is received in the heart it multiplies; if it is rejected one loses all benefit from it. It can be seen how the two parables of 4:21-25 illuminate different aspects of the parable of the sower.

The next parable is found only in Mark. One can sense the zest Jesus has in describing the mystery of plant growth, much like the author of the Creation story (cf. Gen 1:11-12, 29): “Thus is the kingdom of God, as a man throws seed on the earth **[4:26]** and sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows up in a way he does not know **[4:27]**. On its own the earth bears fruit, first the grass, then the head, then the full grain in the head **[4:28]**. When the crop

permits, immediately he puts in the sickle, for the harvest has come [4:29].” The parable reveals that the word has an inner principle of growth that is mysterious, beyond the mind of man, but offering itself to man for his cooperation. Our task is to accept God’s gift, to do the work of tending it, and to harvest its fruits. The word received becomes a principle of life.

Using the surprising “we,” Jesus searches once again for likenesses for the kingdom of God or for a parable by which to present it (4:30). He hits upon the mustard seed, which when it is sown in the ground is the smallest of all the seeds in the ground (4:31), but after it is sown comes up and becomes greater than all the vegetables and puts forth large branches so that under its shade the birds of heaven can nest (4:32). The parable illustrates Paul’s dictum: God’s weakness is stronger than human strength (cf. 1 Cor 1:25). A life that sacrifices the riches and pleasures and securities which promise happiness in the world in order to possess the kingdom of God will win more joy than the world can provide, not only for itself but for others. Christ’s Church, composed of hearers of the word (cf. 3:34-35), will provide shelter for the peoples of the earth (here Jesus cites Dan 4:9, 18). The one who follows Christ will have the kingdom of God and receive back a hundredfold what he has renounced (cf. 10:29-30). It is the narrow way that leads to life (cf. Matt 7:14).

Mark concludes his collection of parables by saying that Jesus used many of these to speak the “word” (cf. 4:14) according to the capacity of the hearers (4:33). In fact he did not speak without parables (4:34a) since metaphor is the human way of reaching spiritual realities, as the whole Bible attests. In metaphor the created world itself comments on, reveals being, divine and participated. Jesus himself is the image or icon of God. But while metaphor reveals it also veils (cf. 4:11), and that is why Jesus interpreted all the parables for his own disciples when they were alone (4:34b), pointing out the direction in which they were to be understood without exhausting them by rational explanation.

The discourse of parables is the longest block of continuous teaching in Mark’s Gospel, although the sermon on the end (13:5-37) will be almost as long. Mark now returns to Jesus’ actions. As the day of parables comes to an end, Jesus, still in the boat, asks to be taken to the opposite shore (4:35). Leaving the crowd, they take him along, and other boats join him (4:36). A fierce gust of wind comes up, and the waves beat upon the boat so that the boat is already being filled (4:37; repetition). Jesus is asleep, and Mark alone gives the detail that he is in the stern with his head on a pillow (4:38a). While in Matthew the disciples approach him respectfully and plea for help (cf. Matt 8:25), in Mark they rouse him with a reproach: “Master, do you not care that we are perishing?” (4:38b). Awakened, he rebukes the wind and says to the sea, “Be quiet, be silent!” (4:39a). Two of these verbs, “rebuke” and “be silent” were used in the account of the exorcism in the synagogue at Capernaum which was the first of Jesus’ miracles in the Gospel (cf. 1:25). At the creation of the world God had “rebuked” the waters engulfing the earth (Ps 104:7-8; cf. also Isa 50:2, Nah 1:4, Pss 17:16,

106:9), often represented as monsters of evil (cf. Pss 89:10-11, 74:13-14). Jesus' rebuking of the waves is of a piece with his rebuking of Satan and the forces of evil: he exercises the power of Yahweh himself. The wind falls and there comes a great calm (**4:39b**). For Mark the episode is one more sign that a divine power is at work in this man (cf. Pss 65:8, 107:29-30). Only now does Jesus speak to the disciples, asking why they were so afraid. How do they not have faith? (**4:40**). This is only the third mention of faith in the Gospel (cf. 1:15, 2:5). It will take time for the disciples to learn that nothing can separate them from God's love in Jesus. They will need to learn to trust in the mystery of the kingdom of God within them as taught in the parables of Chapter 4. The "great fear" with which they fear at the end of the miracle is a first step; they are asking the question about the identity of this man whom the wind and the sea, like the demons (cf. 1:27), obey (**4:41**). Their fear is the experience of man in the presence of his Creator, an awareness that one's life depends on him and can only be received as his gift.

Chapter Five of the Gospel consists of two story units of which the second itself contains two miracle stories. Mark takes 43 verses to tell stories which Matthew told in sixteen (cf. Matt 8:28-34, 9:18-26). While Matthew narrates the main facts, Mark includes details that give vitality to the stories and profile Jesus as a wonderworker with power over demons, chronic illness, and death. The differences from Matthew's account are noted here.

The inhabitants of the opposite side of the lake are called Gerasenes in Matthew and Gadarenes in Mark (**5:1**). Mark pictures Jesus alighting from the boat; he is met by a man with an unclean spirit (**5:2**) while in Matthew, who likes pairs (cf. Matt 9:27, 20:29), there are two demoniacs. Where Matthew is content to say the violence of the men made it impossible for people to pass that way, Mark gives a vivid depiction of the violence: the man had his dwelling among the tombs (already mentioned in vs. 2), and not even with chains was anyone ever able to bind him (**5:3**) since though he was bound many times with fetters and chains the chains were torn apart by him and the fetters broken, and no one was able to subdue him (**5:4**), and throughout the night and day he was in the tombs and in the hills crying out and beating himself with stones (**5:5**). The savagery of the man is supernatural and can only be eliminated by the supernatural. Mark then tells how the man caught sight of Jesus from afar and ran up and prostrated before him (**5:6**; only use of this verb as an act of honor in Mark; see the parody of honor in 15:19). Mark adds to the speech of the demon the name of Jesus, the epithet "Most High" with "God," and the request that Jesus swear not to harm him (**5:7**). Mark then explains the request: Jesus was telling the unclean spirit to come out of the man (**5:8**). Jesus even enters a conversation with the demon, asking him his name and receiving the answer, "My name is legion, since we are many" (**5:9**). The man then beseeches Jesus not to send him out of the region where he has a home (**5:10**). Before recounting the precipitous descent of the herd of pigs Mark twice refers to the unclean spirits "entering" the pigs (**5:12, 13**). Mark specifies the number of the pigs, two thousand, and that they were "drowned" in the sea (**5:13**).

For Matthew at this point the story is over; he has only to relate how the inhabitants of the town, on hearing the swineherds' report, come and see Jesus and ask him to leave their country. Saint Mark has still much to tell. He has the pigherders flee into fields as well as into the town to announce the deed; people come to see the happening (5:14) and behold the demoniac seated and clothed and in his right mind, the one who had the legion, and they "fear" (5:15; cf. 4:41). Jesus has created peace where there was only turbulence, much as in the calming of the storm. The witnesses explain to the others what happened to the demoniac and about the pigs (5:16). Then as Jesus is getting onto the boat, the man who had been possessed asks to come with him (5:18). But Jesus does not allow it, telling him to go back to his own home and family and tell them all the Lord has done for him and how he shown mercy to him (5:19). This the man does, "proclaiming" (cf. 3:14) throughout the Decapolis what Jesus has done for him, and all are amazed (5:20). This "evangelizing" of a pagan territory (cf. the pigs) would have been premature in the Gospel of Matthew, where the mission to the gentiles is reserved till after Jesus' death (cf. Matt 10:5, 15:24, 28:19).

The second unit of Chapter Five is the "sandwich" pericope about the daughter of Jairus and the woman with the flow of blood (cf. Matt 9:18-26). Mark has given a dramatic account of Jesus' power over demons; now he will show Jesus is victor even over death, adding another miracle of healing and important teaching about faith. The main factual difference between Mark's version and Matthew's is that in the latter the official's daughter is already dead when the father asks Jesus' help, whereas in Mark's account she is at the point of death. As in the preceding story of the demoniac, Mark shows Jesus in dialogue with those around him where Matthew does not. Returning from the other side Jesus is met by a large crowd gathered by the lake (5:21). The "leader" of Matthew is identified by Mark as a "synagogue official named Jairus" (5:22), who asks that his daughter may be "saved"—a motif of this unit—and live (5:23). Mark then reports the "press" of people on Jesus as a preparation for the effort of the woman with a hemorrhage to be healed merely by touch (5:24; see on 3:9-10). He also gives the woman's background: having suffered much from many doctors and spent all her money, and not having been helped but rather getting worse (5:26), having heard the reports of Jesus (5:27) and coming behind him she touches his cloak. It is at this point, not after Jesus' words as in Matthew, that she is healed. Immediately her flow of blood is dried up and she knows in her body that she is cured of her affliction (5:29). While Matthew has Jesus turn and see the woman, Mark says only that immediately feeling in himself the power going out of him and turning around in the crowd (5:30) Jesus asks who touched his garment. His disciples point out that with the crowd pressing in on him he has little reason to ask who touched him (5:31); yet Jesus keeps looking around to see who has done it (5:32). The emotions of the woman are recounted: fearing and trembling, knowing what has happened to her, she comes and falls before Jesus and tells him the whole truth (5:33). To the formula "Your faith has saved [cf. vv. 23, 28] you" Jesus adds the comforting words, "Go in peace (cf. Eli's

words to Hannah, 1 Sam 1:17), and remain healed of your affliction” **(5:34)**. Mark has characteristically emphasized the role of touch in the healing. In reporting the woman’s psychological state before, during, and after the healing, he also provides a model of the “faith” that Jesus demands, since it is to this faith that Jesus attributes the saving. A similar study of “faith in action” could be made of all the places where faith is mentioned in the Gospels (cf. so far in Mark, 1:15, 2:5, 4:40). Here some notes of faith are these: hearing about Jesus, a conviction that he can help, the experience that no one else can help, the resoluteness to approach him, the awareness of the sufficiency of touching his garment, a sense of unworthiness, reverential fear, the feel of returning health. The story thus beautifully demonstrates, as we approach the middle of the Gospel, the divine and human sides of the act of salvation: the flow of healing from the body of the Lord and the human emptiness that is ready to receive it. In subsequent stories Jesus will both commend faith where he finds it and chastise its absence.

At this point messengers arrive from the synagogue officials’ house with the news that his daughter has already died and he should no longer trouble the “teacher,” as Jesus is now called **(5:35)**; cf. 4:38). Overhearing the message, Jesus comforts the official telling him not to fear but to “believe” **(5:36)**, not in Matthew; cf. 5:34), showing the same kindness he has just expressed to the woman. While in Matthew Jesus proceeds to the miracle alone, in Mark he takes with him Peter and James and John the brother of James **(5:37)**. After being mocked by the mourners, Jesus ejects them all and takes the father and mother of the child with his companions into the child’s room **(5:40)**. Jesus not only takes the girl’s hand but addresses her in Aramaic, “Talitha kum,” which Mark translates as “Little girl, I say to you, arise” **(5:41)**. We have hints here both of the mockery to which Jesus will be subjected at the end of his life and the theme of resurrection. As he did with the Gerasene demoniac and the woman with the hemorrhage, Mark takes the trouble to describe the healed person: she walks around, being twelve years old, and immediately the bystanders are amazed with great astonishment **(5:42)**. Jesus urges them not to make the miracle known (cf. 1:44) and has the consideration to see that the girl gets something to eat **(5:43)**. The Marcan Jesus shows the grandeur of compassion, while Matthew’s exhibits the majesty of authority. No single viewer of Jesus could have absorbed and presented all the nuances of his divine-human personality.

The next episode follows up on the theme of faith from the two previous miracles (cf. 5:34, 36). Faith enables Jesus to work miracles; lack of faith does not. Jesus’ own townspeople are unable to see beyond the man they have always known to the deeper identity within. Mark’s version of the story is nearly identical to Matthew’s. He specifies that the encounter in the synagogue takes place on the sabbath **(6:2)**, adds Jesus’ relatives to those who do not honor him **(6:4)**, claims not merely that Jesus does not perform but that he cannot perform miracles there, mentions the cure of a few ill persons on whom Jesus lays hands **(6:5)**, and expresses Jesus’ wonderment at the people’s lack of faith **(6:6a)**.

Jesus seems more vulnerable than in Matthew. He leaves his home to teach in towns roundabout **(6:6b)**.

Jesus has already chosen twelve to help him in extending his ministry. They are to be with him, to preach, and to cast out demons (cf. 3:14-15). He now sends them out, two by two, to carry out the latter two tasks, giving them power over unclean spirits **(6:7)**. They are to take nothing on the way but what is essential to their task, a single staff (not allowed in Matthew), no bread, no traveler's bag, no money in the belt **(6:8)**, a pair of sandals (not allowed in Matthew), only one cloak **(6:9; cf. Matt 10:9-10a)**. They should stay in the same house when they visit a town **(6:10; cf. Matt 10:11b)**. After his reception in his hometown Jesus envisages the possibility that the preachers will not be "received" or "listened to," in which case they are to leave the town shaking the dust from their feet in witness against them **(6:11; cf. Matt 10:14)**. It is from these simple instructions that the great Apostolic Discourse of Matthew 10 develops. Jesus' concern is that the preachers' focus should be entirely on their task. Going out, the twelve "proclaim that men should repent" **(6:12; cf. 1:15)**, and they cast out many demons and anoint with oil many who are ill (cf. 6:5) and cure them **(6:13)**. The apostles carry on Jesus' mission; it is implied that the anointing of the sick with oil is the equivalent of the healing touch of Jesus himself. Like John the Baptist they preach repentance (cf. 1:4) but like Jesus they perform works of healing. The positive content of their message is not mentioned; the wonders they perform is teaching enough that the power of God is manifested on earth by these men sent by Jesus. What is required of men is the "repentance" by which they recognize their need for this saving power of God. Later the message will be the good news of the resurrection of God's envoy and the response will be the faith that has been prepared by repentance.

It may be that the rejection of Jesus by his own townspeople has precipitated the need to send evangelizers farther afield. This will be a pattern in the spread of Christianity. It is when the Gospel is rejected by the Jews that it finds a reception among the gentiles (cf. Matt 8:11-12, 21:43, 22:8-10, Acts 8:1, 4-8, 13:46-49, 18:6, 28:23-28, Rom 11:12-15, 25). Jesus' reputation is spreading and has reached King Herod's ears, who thinks that Jesus must be John the Baptist risen from the dead, since such powers are at work in him **(6:14)**. Others have other opinions: Jesus is Elijah or another one of the prophets **(6:15)**, but when Herod hears this he remains convinced that this is John whom he has had beheaded and who has risen from the dead **(6:16)**. Mark must now give the details of John's death, and he will take the opportunity of the apostles' absence on their journey to tell it here. The story will constitute a turning point in the ministry of Jesus.

Herod had sent to have John arrested and bound in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married **(6:17)**; for John had told Herod it was unlawful for him to have his brother's wife **(6:18)**. Herodias had a grudge against John and "wished to kill him" (desire attributed to Herod in Matthew) but was unable to **(6:19)**, for Herod feared (a mixture of reverent [cf.

4:41, 5:33] and craven [cf. 5:15] fear) John, knowing him to be a just and holy man, and he protected him, and when he heard him he was very much disturbed yet listened to him gladly (**6:20**). The complexity of emotions is distinctly Marcan; in Matthew Herod simply fears the crowd who regard Jesus as a prophet (cf. Matt 14:5). An opportune day comes when Herod on his birthday gives a banquet for “his courtiers and commanders and the leading men of Galilee” (**6:21**, guests not specified in Matthew). When he is pleased with the dance of Herodias’ daughter, Mark reports his lengthy speech to the girl: “‘Ask me what you will, and I will give it to you,’ and he swore to her, ‘Whatever you ask I will give you even if it is half of my kingdom’” (**6:22b-23**); Matthew gives the same idea in eight words of indirect speech (cf. Matt 14:7). Mark shows the girl leaving to consult her mother and reports the brief dialogue between the two (**6:24**), and he seems to relish telling of the girl’s return: “And coming in immediately with haste before the king, she asked in these words, ‘I want you to give me at once on a plate the head of John the Baptist’” (**6:25**). The drama of Mark’s account easily lent itself to development into full blown play by Oscar Wilde and into opera by Richard Strauss. Becoming grieved, the king, because of his oaths and his guests, could not refuse her (**6:26**). Matthew reports the king’s order and the beheading in seven words, Mark in eighteen (**6:27**). The conclusions of the two accounts are similar. One can admire both the lively detail of Mark and the literary economy of Matthew.

Mark does not record that Jesus was informed of John’s death, but a subsequent remark of Jesus will show its effect on him. Asked why Elijah must come before the end, Jesus says, “I tell you that Elijah has come and they have treated him as they pleased, just as the scriptures say about him” (9:13). Just as Jesus has followed John in preaching repentance, so he will follow him in being rejected by lawless men and put to death. After John’s death Jesus will have to begin preparing his followers for a time when he too will have been cruelly taken away (cf. 2:20) from them. Mark’s readers have been given a preview of the fate that awaits the envoy of God among sinful men.

The “apostles” (only here in Mark) gather with Jesus and announce to him what they have done and “taught” (**6:30**, a verb which was not part of their instructions). Understanding the human needs of the apostles, Jesus invites them to come by themselves to a desert place and rest a little. For many people are coming and going and they do not have time to eat (**6:31**). So they go in the boat to a deserted place by themselves (**6:32**; note repetition). In Matthew it is on hearing of the death of the Baptist that Jesus withdraws by boat to a deserted place by himself. Mark reports how people took notice of the departure and “ran” there from “all” the cities and “arrived first” (**6:33**), details missing in Matthew.

Alighting from the boat Jesus sees a large crowd and is moved to pity for them since they are like sheep without a shepherd (**6:34a**). Their eagerness to find him is a sign of their need for guidance and nourishment. They are not being spiritually fed by their leaders (cf. Ezek 34:5; this is why he needs to send his representatives, as Moses sent Joshua before his death, cf. Num 27:17. When

Matthew cites the phrase about sheep without a shepherd it is the introduction to the Discourse to the Apostles). Forgotten or abandoned is the need for retirement and refreshment. Jesus demonstrates his compassion for the crowd by teaching them at length (**6:34b**; in Matthew he cures their sick, cf. Matt 14:14). The teaching would be about the coming of the reign of God in his own person and the need to take his word and presence to heart in order to win abundant life (cf. 1:14-15, 2:9-11, 17, 19-22, 25-28, 3:4, 23-29, 33-35, and the themes of the Discourse of Parables, 4:1-34).

As the hour becomes late Jesus' disciples come to him and point out that since the area is deserted and the hour late (**6:35**), he should dismiss the people so that they might go through the neighboring fields and towns to buy themselves something to eat (**6:36**). Since he has been thinking in terms of sending the apostles to do his work of shepherding (cf. 6:7, 34), he tells them, "Give them food yourselves" (**6:37a**). When they ask if they should go spend two hundred denarii (a sum they do not have) on bread and give it to the people (**6:37b**), he says, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see" (Matthew eliminates the mutual questions). When they have found out, they tell him, "Five, and two fish" (**6:38**). He orders them to have all the people recline in orderly groups on the "green" (Mark alone) grass (**6:39**). And they lie down in separate groups of fifty and one hundred (**6:40**, not in Matthew). Jesus is taking pains to assimilate what he is about to do to the desert experience of Israel. Moses had divided the Israelites into groups of fifty and one hundred (cf. Exod 18:25, Deut 1:15), particularly in the context of providing judges or leaders for each group. It was also through Moses that the people were promised bread in the desert (Exod 16:2-4). This bread was provided by God "from heaven" (cf. Exod 16:4, Ps 78:24, 105:40, Wis 16:20); similarly Jesus, before ordering the bread to be distributed, taking the loaves and fish, looking up to heaven, gives thanks to God (**6:41a**). The loaves are the bearers of this thanksgiving. In acknowledging them as the gift of God Jesus praises his Father (cf. 1:11) for all his gifts, recognizes that all is from God. At that very moment, the moment that the Father's lordship is acknowledged, the bread becomes the bearer of new gifts from God. It is the principle Jesus has already taught: he who has (i.e., receives with gratitude) will be given more (cf. 4:24-25). Jesus has only to break the loaves and give them to the disciples to be distributed, also dividing the fish for all (**6:41b**), and all eat and are satisfied (**6:42**). The food is superabundant: they collect twelve baskets full of crumbs and scraps of fish (**6:43**); those eating the bread numbered five thousand (**6:44**). Jesus has performed a visible sign of the even more important feeding he intends to give by offering a life beyond death, a life that is also to be given through bread. As the physical bread was a sign of the spiritual, so are the physical healings of Jesus signs of the more fundamental healing from sin which he offers (cf. 2:9-12). The physical sign is both a proof of supernatural power and an image of a specific kind or form of grace: physical healing is a sign of eternal life, multiplication of loaves is a sign of divine nourishment. In acting like Moses in the desert Jesus has created the new Israel. The works of Moses themselves

become a sign, like the healings and feeding, of the definitive coming of the kingdom of God.

Still concerned not to tax the twelve and at the same time seeking communion with his Father, Jesus has the disciples get into the boat and precede him to Bethsaida on the other side while he dismisses the crowd (**6:45**). Taking leave of them he goes onto the hill to pray (**6:46**), as he did after his first day of miracles (cf. 1:35). The prayer would be an extension of the thanksgiving he pronounced over the loaves and fishes, a union of wills with his loving Father. This would be Jesus' food, as he will say in the Gospel of John (cf. John 4:34), for he draws life from the Father (cf. John 6:57). As night falls the boat is in the middle of the lake while he is alone on the land (**6:47**). In prayer Jesus sees the men straining at the oars, for the wind is against them; toward the fourth watch of the night he comes toward them walking on the sea (**6:48a**). The action, presented so normally, is one more manifestation of the divine power of Jesus, like the exorcisms, the forgiving of sins, the assumption of the roles of bridegroom and lord of the sabbath, the calming of the storm, the multiplication of food. It was Yahweh who had power over the sea, as demonstrated at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (cf. Exod 14:21, 15:8, Ps 77:20, and see on Mark 4:39).

It is in Jesus' prayer that he sees the need to come to the help of the disciples. Quiet time in this Gospel seems to be made to be interrupted (cf. 6:31-34). But Jesus seems to be about to pass by the disciples (**6:48b**, Mark only). He wants both to make himself available to them and to provoke their awareness of his mysterious presence. Seeing him walking on the water, they think it is a ghost and cry out (**6:49**), for all see him and are terrified (**6:50a**). But he immediately speaks with them and tells them, "Have courage; it is I; do not fear" (**6:50b**). The words "It is I" read literally, "I am," and cannot but evoke the name of Israel's God in the Old Testament (cf. Isa 43:10, Exod 3:14). Given the other manifestations of the divinity of Jesus, it would be hard not to see Jesus as identifying himself as Yahweh himself. The admonition not to fear is a constant refrain of God in the Hebrew scriptures (cf. Exod 14:13, 20:20, Deut 1:29, 3:22, Isa 43:1, 5); the fearsome presence of God is the presence of overwhelming love for those who surrender to it. Jesus comes to them into the boat, and "the wind becomes calm" (= 4:39), and they are exceedingly utterly amazed in themselves (**6:51**, KJV has "and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered"); only pleonasm can suggest the men's experience of the divine in Jesus. The apparition prepares for the fuller theophany at the transfiguration. Mark points out that if the disciples had been logical they would have understood the supernatural identity of Jesus from the miracle of the loaves, but "their hearts were hardened" (**6:52**), as were those of the critics of Jesus in 3:5. It will take a divine patience to lead even well-disposed men to a knowing faith.

When Jesus lands at Gennesareth (**6:53**), four miles southwest of Capernaum, he is like a magnet attracting people from all over the region (cf. already 1:32-33, 3:7-8, 6:33-34). Mark's account adds considerable detail to

Matthew's (see italics): *As soon as he steps out of the boat* people recognize him **(6:54)** and *run* (cf. 5:6) *through* that whole country and *begin to carry about* their sick *on pallets* (cf. 2:4, 11, 12) *to the place where he is* **(6:55)**. *And wherever he goes, in towns or cities or farms, in the market places they put down the ailing* and beg him that they might touch (cf. 3:10) at least the hem of his garment (cf. 5:27, 28, 30); and those who touch it/him [it RSV, Anchor, Sacra Pagina; him NJB, NAB, Hermeneia] are saved **(6:56)**. The focus is on healing with no mention of exorcisms. This is Mark's final summary of the triumphant Galilean ministry. It ends with the word "saved" (cf. 3:4, 5:34), the all-embracing verb which captures the essence of Jesus' mission: by taking away the ills that impede a full life for man on this earth, he is revealing his power to take away both death itself and the power of sin which brought death into the world. The least physical contact with his person brings this salvation. In handing on these powers to the twelve Jesus provides for his continuing healing presence on earth in his Church, which mediates his saving power through her physical signs called sacraments (cf. already 6:13 where oil is used in place of the touch of Jesus). Despite Jesus' success with the people, official opposition is mounting against him, and the martyrdom of the Baptist has shown that the holiest of men will not be appreciated for preaching the truth. Jesus will soon leave Galilee with his disciples and concentrate on teaching them the manner in which his saving work is to be completed.

Jesus has attracted the attention of the Jerusalem authorities. The Pharisees and certain scribes from there gather around Jesus **(7:1)**, looking for faults against the Law (cf. 3:2). They soon notice that his disciples eat bread with impure, that is, unwashed hands **(7:2)**. This will be the second episode of several in which "bread" will play a part. Mark takes the trouble to explain to the reader the rabbinic laws about washing. The Pharisees and all Jews do not eat without thoroughly (to the wrist, elbow?) washing their hands, observing the traditions of the elders **(7:3)**, and they do not eat [food] from the market place without sprinkling it, and there are many other things which have been handed down to be observed, purifyings of cups and pitchers and kettles **(7:4)**. Somewhat carried away by his love for detail and perhaps his contempt for the minutiae of the traditions, Mark returns to the story. The Pharisees and scribes ask Jesus why his disciples do not "walk" according to the tradition of the elders but eat bread with impure hands **(7:5)**; note repetition). Jesus' reaction is as strong as it was in the synagogue at Caphernaum (cf. 3:5); for the only time in this Gospel he addresses the questioners as "hypocrites" (as opposed to Matthew's fifteen times), citing the same Isaiah passage that appears in Matthew **(7:6-7)**; cf. Matt 15:8-9 = Isa 29:13 LXX). Abandoning the commandment of God they hold to the traditions of men **(7:8)**. The Law spoke of washing vessels that had touched unclean animals (Lev 11:31-38), but not of washing all vessels or hands before eating. By trying to explicitate the observance of the Mosaic Law the Pharisees were able to generate customs by which they could guarantee their holiness; the focus shifted from God to themselves. It was this self-justification that Jesus had

to break through. He could only “save” those who knew they could not purify themselves, hence his call to “repentance.”

With sarcasm Jesus repeats his accusation: “How nicely you set aside the command of God in order to preserve your traditions” **(7:9)**. The particular breaking of a commandment Jesus has in mind, which was presented in Matthew before the Isaiah citation (cf. Matt 15:4-6), appears after it in Mark (7:10-13). The two accounts of the breaking of the fourth commandment are the same, Mark adding the Aramaic word “Korban” for the “gift” to God which prevents doing anything for one’s parents **(7:11)**; cf. Aramaic in 5:41). God’s Law is for the good of men not for self-aggrandizement, a point that Jesus has to make over and over (cf. 2:16-17, 25-27).

The reaction of the Pharisees is not mentioned, but Jesus is now in the teaching mode and again calls together the crowd to explain what is wrong with the rules of ritual washing, or rather with identifying them with godliness **(7:14)**. He will have them “listen and understand.” Nothing coming into a man from the outside can defile him; but the things that come out of a man, these defile the man **(7:15)**. The parable is explained to the disciples when they enter the house apart from the crowd **(7:17)**; the best witnesses omit **7:16**, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear”). Jesus is disappointed that even they lack understanding **(7:17a)**; cf. 6:52). His explanation repeats the parable: do they not know that everything coming into a man from outside cannot defile him **(7:18)** because it does not enter his heart but his stomach and comes out in the latrine **(7:19)**; Mark adds in parenthesis that Jesus thus renders all foods clean)? Jesus picks up the theme of the “heart” from the Isaiah passage, reminding his hearers that it is the heart of a man that God wants, not human practices that do not emerge from a personal dedication to God. For the first time Jesus indicates the real sicknesses from which men need to be freed. It is what comes out of a man that defiles the man **(7:20)**. For from within, from the heart of men evil intentions proceed: fornications, thefts, murders **(7:21)**, adulteries, greediness, malicious acts (all violations of the ten commandments), deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, pride, foolishness **(7:22)**. Sins of action, of the tongue, of passion, of ill-will, of self-exaltation all have their root in the heart or intention of man. It is these evils coming from within that a man must be purified of, not the dirt on his hands **(7:23)**. Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount with its teaching on purity of heart and the God who sees in secret (cf. Matt 5:8, 28, 6:1-4+, 21-23) is an elaboration of the teaching of this passage. Jesus will teach in Jerusalem that it is love of God from one’s whole heart that God wants above all (cf. 12:30, 33), and Mark has already taught that it is hardness of heart that prevents men from surrendering to God in Christ (3:5). The Gospel is taking us on a journey into the heart of man.

For an unexplained reason Jesus journeys to the pagan territory of Tyre on the Mediterranean coast. Going into a house he wishes to remain incognito but cannot remain hidden **(7:24)**. The journey is one more foray outside of Galilee (cf. 5:1, and the following pericope, 7:31) and like the visit of Tyrians and others in 3:8 prepares us for the spread of the gospel to the pagans. Immediately

hearing about him, a woman whose daughter has an “unclean spirit” (cf. 1:23, 3:11, 5:2) comes and falls at his feet **(7:25)**. She is a gentile, of the Syrophenician nation, and asks Jesus to cast out the demon from her daughter **(7:26)**. Mark’s account lacks the woman’s progressive overcoming of Jesus’ resistance found so powerfully in Matthew (cf. Matt 15:21-28). Jesus simply says the children should be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs **(7:27)**. Again we have the theme of bread (cf. 6:41, 7:5), here a symbol of God’s blessings intended for Israel. When the woman retorts that the dogs under the table eat the scraps that fall from the children **(7:28)**, Jesus simply tells her that on account of that statement she can go, for the “demon” (cf. 1:34, 39, 3:22) has left her daughter **(7:29)**. There is no encomium of the woman’s faith. Returning home she finds the child lying on the bed with the demon gone **(7:30)**. For once Matthew’s account excels Mark’s in drama.

By a curious route Jesus moves from Tyre via Sidon to the sea of Galilee into the middle of the territory called the Decapolis (ten cities), the area mostly east of the lake characterized by Greek culture **(7:31)**. Here will occur one of two singular miracles found only in Mark’s Gospel and bearing typical traits of this evangelist. People bring Jesus a deaf man with impaired speech and exhort him to place his hand on him **(7:32)**. In a long sentence Mark describes a series of strange actions by which Jesus performs the healing. Taking the man away from the crowd by himself, he places his fingers in the man’s ears and, spitting, touches his tongue [with the spittle] **(7:33)**, and looking up to heaven (cf. 6:41), groans and says, “Ephphatha,” which means, “Be opened” **(7:34)**; Aramaic as in 5:41, 7:11). The syntax follows a pattern of participle followed by verb (three times) and ends with a direct quotation. Mark emphasizes that the healing occurs through physical contact with Jesus (fingers and spittle; cf. 1:31, 41, 5:23, 41, 6:5), that it causes some difficulty to Jesus, and that Jesus implores divine help. The healing is a kind of liturgy, an act of intercessory worship by which Jesus in his very body becomes the mediator of healing grace. The fact that Jesus has found men slow to understand the meaning of his ministry suggests that the deaf man symbolizes this obtuseness of understanding, an obstacle which Jesus can only remove with great difficulty. The “groaning” of Jesus is the groaning of suffering and of prayer (cf. Rom 8:22-23), of longing for the freedom of creation from bondage to decay. The man’s ears are opened and immediately the bond of his tongue is loosed and he speaks correctly **(7:35)**. Jesus orders the witnesses to tell no one (cf. 5:43), but the more he commands, the more abundantly they “proclaim” it **(7:36)**. They are amazed beyond all measure, saying “He has done all things well, and the deaf he makes hear and the mute [he makes] speak” **(7:37)**. The saying expresses simply and accurately the reason why people of all times have followed Jesus.

Without any indication of place Mark tells “again” the story of a miraculous feeding “in those days.” This time the feeding is not in the context of teaching. Mark simply says a great crowd had nothing to eat, so Jesus, calling together the disciples **(8:1)**, says to them “I have compassion for the crowd, since they have

been with me three days and have nothing to eat **[8:2]**; and if I dismiss them without food to go to their homes, they will give out on the way, and some of them have come from far away **[8:3]**". In the earlier miracle it was the disciples who raised the question about feeding the crowd. Here the impression is given that Jesus has a lesson to teach and that the disciples will have no recollection of the earlier feeding. They in fact ask, "Where will anyone be able to obtain bread to satisfy these people in this uninhabited place?" **(8:4)**. Jesus asks as before how many loaves they have, and they reply seven **(8:5)**. He instructs the people to lie down on the ground and performs the same actions with the bread as before (6:41), although here Mark omits the raising of his eyes to heaven and replaces the verb "bless" (*eulogēsen*) with "give thanks" (*eucharistēsas*) **(8:6)**. They also had a few fish, and saying a blessing over these he tells them to distribute them as well **(8:7)**. They eat and are satisfied, and abundant fragments are collected, seven baskets **(8:8)**. The repetition of the same formula for the two miracles suggests that Jesus is deliberately establishing a certain ritual. We will meet it again at his last meal with the disciples. This time there were four thousand men, and Jesus dismisses them **(8:9)**. This is the fourth episode to mention bread since the first feeding. Immediately getting into the boat with his disciples, Jesus goes to the region of Dalmanutha (not otherwise known; **8:10**).

The Pharisees (cf. 7:1, 5) reappear and engage him in dispute, seeking from him a sign from heaven **(8:11)**, testing him (like Satan, cf. 1:13). Unconvinced by the signs of divine authority Jesus has already manifested, they wish to be the ones to determine which standards Jesus should meet, like the Jews testing God in the desert (cf. Ps 95:9, Num 14:22). While Matthew reports a teaching of Jesus on this occasion (cf. Matt 16:2-4), Mark gives the emotion of Jesus, who "sighs deeply in his spirit" (verb from the same root as "groan" in 7:34) and says only, "Why does this generation seek a sign? I tell you solemnly, no sign will be given this generation" **(8:12)**. The Pharisees will not reappear until Jesus nears Jerusalem where they will again be found testing him (cf. 10:2, later 12:13). Leaving them and again getting into the boat, Jesus departs for the other side of the lake **(8:13)**.

Mark has yet another episode about bread (cf. 6:41, 7:2, 5, 27, 8:6). The disciples have forgotten to bring bread and have only one loaf with them in the boat **(8:14)**. His mind still on the Pharisees' testing and on Herod's murder of John, Jesus instructs the disciples to be on guard and watch against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod **(8:15)**. He knows that the corrupt attitudes of men like these can infiltrate the hearts of men as leaven permeates dough; his disciples must be on guard lest that happen to them. But preoccupied about their forgetfulness of bread, they cannot raise their minds to the spiritual meaning of Jesus' words (a frequent phenomenon in the Gospel of John, cf. John 3:3-4, 4:32-33, etc.). They hear "leaven" and tell each other he is chastising them for not bringing bread **(8:16)**. Knowing this, he fires at them a volley of exasperated questions. There are seven questions, some of them in two parts. It is Jesus' most prolonged challenge to his followers to think deeply about the

implications of what they have seen and heard and to come to conclusions about his true identity. His challenge will shortly bear fruit. He first asks why they discuss having no bread. Do they not yet realize and not yet understand? Do they have hardened hearts? (**8:17**; cf. 3:5, 6:52). Having eyes do they not see; having ears do they not hear? (**8:18**, a citation of Jer 5:21, reminiscent of Isa 6:9-10, cited by Jesus in the Discourse of Parables, 4:12). It will be remembered that Jesus has just restored hearing to a deaf man, and he will shortly restore sight to a blind man; his question here is a sign that these miracles have symbolic as well as literal reference. And do the disciples not remember, when he broke the five loaves for the five thousand how many baskets full of scraps did they pick up? They tell him twelve (**8:19**). And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did they pick up? And they answer seven (**8:20**). Jesus says finally, "Do you not yet understand?" (**8:21**). He desires them to take to heart his infinite power and goodness and to learn to trust in them (cf. Matt 6:25-34).

Jesus loses no time in performing the miracle of sight. When they arrive at Bethsaida, *people bring him a blind man and exhort Jesus to touch him* (**8:22**). Jesus' unusual actions are similar to those performed on the deaf man (cf. 7:31-36; italicized words are found in both stories). *Taking him* by the hand he leads him outside the town, and *spitting* on his eyes and *placing his hands on him*, asks him if he can see anything (**8:23**). *Looking up*, the man says he sees men but they look like trees walking (**8:24**). Yet again Jesus places his hands on the man's eyes, and he opens his eyes wide and is cured and has a clear view of everything plainly (**8:25**). The fact that the miracle is performed in two stages is a sign that men come to full faith generally by stages. The following pericope, also in two stages, will make the same point. Jesus sends the man away to his house, telling him not to go into the town (**8:26**; cf. 7:36, etc.).

Jesus has now done all he can to convince men of his divine identity. They have only formally to recognize it. Jesus now gives them the opportunity to do so. He takes the disciples away to the towns around Caesarea Philippi several miles north of the lake near the headwaters of the Jordan, and on the way he asks them who men say that he is (**8:27**). The question has been raised since the beginning of the Gospel (cf. 1:24, 27, 34, 2:7, 3:22, 4:41, 6:2-3, 8:19-20); it is time that men give an answer. The disciples give the three opinions about Jesus' identity already reported to King Herod in 6:14-16: some say he is John the Baptist, others Elijah, others one of the prophets (**8:28**). Now Jesus would know what the disciples themselves think. Peter answers simply, "You are the Christ" (**8:29**). This man of whom we have heard very little in this Gospel and know only as a fisherman who responded immediately to the call of Jesus (cf. 1:16-17) and seems an informal leader of the group (cf. 1:29-30, 36, 3:16, 5:37), has seen clearly into the depth of Jesus' nature and confesses publicly that Jesus is the Son of David who was expected to come and liberate his people. This Son of David was the "Messiah," "the Christ," Hebrew and Greek terms respectively for "the anointed one" of the Lord. Peter knows in an instinctive way what the

lettered officials of Judaism have not seen, that the power of God is at work in this man. He has intuited what Jesus heard at his baptism, that Jesus is “Son of God,” since the reigning descendant of David enjoyed that dignity (cf. 2 Sam 7:14, Ps 2:7, Mark 1:11), although Peter does not use that title here. Mark will save it for the centurion’s profession of faith at the end of the Gospel. The proximity of Peter’s statement to the healing of the blind man (cf. 8:25) leads us to think that the “opening” of Peter’s “eyes” is the work of the Lord himself, a point specifically made by Jesus in Matthew’s account of the incident (cf. Matt 16:17 where Jesus attributes the confession to his “Father in heaven”). The whole Gospel story has been leading up to this point where a human being accepts the messiahship of Jesus, an acceptance which may be shared by the other disciples. It is surprising that Jesus’ only reaction to Peter’s confession is to “rebuke” the disciples not to tell anyone about his identity (**8:30**). The command is consistent with Jesus’ constant warnings (cf. most recently 8:26).

Having won his disciple’s firm confession, Jesus can now begin to teach how he will carry out his role of Messiah. The teaching will be difficult, it will provoke reactions, it will constitute a new level of learning on the part of the disciples. From now on Jesus will withdraw from the public eye in order to catechize the disciples about both his Messiahship and its consequences for their behavior as followers of his. He immediately begins teaching how “the Son of Man,” a term he has used of himself in connection with the forgiveness of sins (cf. 2:10) and mastery over the sabbath (cf. 2:28), must suffer many things (**8:31a**). Jesus seems to prefer this term when speaking about his lowly condition as a human being destined to experience the results of human sin; the astonishing Good News is that this man of sorrows is also divine Lord and Messiah. The Gospel has already hinted at the sufferings of Jesus: there were the critiques of the scribes and Pharisees (cf. 2:6-8, 16, 24, 3:2, 7:5, 8:11-12), the attribution of his works to Satan (cf. 3:22-23, 30), mockery (cf. 5:40), unbelief on the part of his townspeople (cf. 6:4-6a), the death of the precursor (cf. 6:28), the difficulty of restoring the ability to hear and see (cf. 7:34, 8:23-25), the slowness of the disciples to comprehend (cf. 8:17-21), and the ever-present misunderstanding of his mission that led him to silence men and demons about his identity. These sufferings are but the prelude to the greater ones: he is to be condemned by the elders and chief priests and scribes and put to death (**8:31b**). With the mention of elders and chief priests, Jesus is implying an official sentence by the authorities in Jerusalem, where his reputation has already spread (cf. 3:7-8, 22). At this point in the Gospel it is hard to imagine that this official execution will be the conclusion of Jesus’ ministry which has been so well received by the people. If the disciples will find it hard to take in this teaching, it will be even harder for them to understand Jesus’ further prediction that he will “rise” after three days (**8:31c**). Jesus spoke this “word” quite openly (**8:32a**), an openness that seems to balance the silence about his achievements that he has enjoined on others.

The Peter who recognized Jesus' nature cannot take this new teaching in. Taking Jesus aside he begins to "rebuke" (!) him (**8:32b**; cf. 8:30). The Lord whom he has learned to love cannot be destined for such a cruel end. But turning around and seeing his disciples, Jesus in turn "rebukes" Peter before them all and in the strongest language. He tells Peter, "Get behind me, Satan, for you are not thinking the things of God but those of men" (**8:33**). Peter is performing the role of the tempter (cf. 1:13), attempting to sway the Lord from a predestined course. Peter has indeed been enlightened by the Lord to understand his true identity; he has yet to allow himself to learn that the Messiah will enter on his reign by a way that confounds all human understanding and expectation. It will be a painful lesson for him to learn (cf. 14:72). If we learn anything from Peter in the Scriptures it is that discipleship is a matter of learning the need to be saved from one's own sin, one's obtuseness to the divine plan. Peter will be the leader of Christ's Church not because of his human virtues but because of his avowal of weaknesses in the presence of the forgiving Lord. For the moment he must mull over how he could be identified with the very demons whom Jesus has been putting to rout.

Jesus wastes no time in drawing the crowd together with his disciples to explain his new teaching. If anyone wants to come "after him" (the same preposition as "behind" in the preceding verse), he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow him (**8:34**). Whoa! Nothing will have prepared the crowd for this teaching. Jesus is assuming that those who have recognized the beauty of his works (cf. 7:37) will want to be in his entourage. To do this they will first have to deny their former way of thinking, what Jesus called the thoughts of men (cf. 8:33) and the "leaven" of the Pharisees and people like Herod (cf. 8:15). Discipleship entails by its very name a willingness to listen to the master and be taught by him. It implies that one does not yet know what he needs to know. He must be open to unexpected truths. In addition he may need to deny his own preferences, as an athlete in training has to deny himself certain foods and comforts. Above all a man will have to learn to reject his own sinfulness, not by putting an end to it, which he cannot do, but by repenting of it. All this is contained in Jesus' first verb "deny." Secondly the disciple must "take up his cross." The hearers would recognize this description of condemned criminals having to carry their own instrument of death to the place of execution. That this would be the way Jesus himself would be killed would be an even greater horror than the simple prediction of his death (cf. 8:31). This second injunction should be read in connection with the third, "and follow me." The "following" of Jesus we first met at the call of the first disciples (cf. 1:18, 2:14) then with the crowds (cf. 3:7) is now seen to be a willingness to follow Jesus along the way of his own suffering and death. The injunction/invitation will only fully make sense after Jesus' death and resurrection. The disciple will be conformed to Jesus by accepting the suffering he encounters in his adherence to the will of God as taught by Jesus. He will have before him the model of Jesus who bore his suffering obediently and triumphed over it to live a deathless life. The disciples

will have registered this teaching of Jesus without being able to understand it until the Lord's death and resurrection had taken place. Discipleship would then be seen as a following of the Lord through his passion and death to his resurrection.

The new teaching of Jesus is developed by two pairs of sayings all connected by the word "life" (lit. "soul"). The conjunction "For" shows that these sayings are explanations of the fundamental saying about denying oneself and carrying the cross. "Whoever wishes to save his soul will lose it; whoever loses his soul for my sake and for that of the Gospel will save it" (8:35). The striking matched paradoxes are a call for thinking about and establishing one's priorities. People generally want to "save" their own lives, that is, make them happy, successful, comfortable. Jesus warns that an excessive preoccupation with this kind of life leads to that life slipping from one's grasp. The life that we yearn for, an authentic life without end, is beyond our grasp. Jesus has shown himself capable of overcoming the things that attack and diminish human life. He has shown that he wants to do this, that is, to "save life" (cf. 3:4; cf. also 5:23, 28, 34, 6:56). If Jesus is the one who can truly give the life we seek, then it makes sense to surrender the control of our lives to him and to accept the various ways we will have to "deny ourselves" for the attainment of that goal. The pair of sayings are a mixture of positive and negative, light and dark, so arranged as to culminate in life. Jesus asks a total commitment to himself and to the Gospel he preaches so that he might fill the disciple with the life he has come to bestow. So far the "Gospel" means the preaching of Jesus to this point about the kingdom of God, but it will come to mean the good news of his resurrection from the dead. In the very moment that Jesus has told the disciples of his coming death, he is suggesting that that death will bring a new kind of life.

Another "for" introduces the second pair of sayings about one's "life" ("soul"). "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and to lose his life? [8:36]. For what can a man give as an exchange for his life? [8:37]". Even more clearly than the previous pair, this pair of sayings forces the hearer/reader to ask whether the fullest happiness this world can provide is all that he is made for, or does he long for a life that transcends death? If the latter is available to him, would not one make every sacrifice to gain it? Jesus' revolutionary sayings awaken men to the desire for lasting life deep within them, a life which hitherto had not even seemed thinkable because of the law of death. Jesus opens the possibility of a life without end that will ultimately consist in eternal friendship with him in his risen glory. In the second saying of the pair he asks men to respect their own souls, the dignity of their longing for authentic life. Why would one forsake such a life for a paltry temporary good?

This series of teachings ends with a third pair of sayings that both refer to a future "coming." Jesus has identified himself as the giver of authentic life to those who commit themselves to him. He now says that anyone who is ashamed of him and his words (teachings) in the present adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father

with the holy angels (**8:38**). He says clearly for the first time that he, the same “Son of Man” who is destined to suffer much and be killed (cf. 8:31), will “come” at some point in the glory of his Father, Israel’s God. Acknowledged by God as his Son at his baptism, Jesus has not yet, in this Gospel, referred to God as his Father. But if he is “Christ,” then he is son of God (see on 8:29). Jesus is telling the disciples they can expect this man who has in so many ways shown himself full of the power of God to appear at some point with God, and to appear in some kind of judgment since he will “be ashamed of” (not recognize) those who on earth were ashamed of him (cf. Matt 25:41-46). The world is an “adulterous and sinful generation” because of its tendency to prefer creatures of this world to their Creator. He has experienced this rejection in the hardened hearts and lack of faith of so many. When he comes in glory he will be served by the angels who ministered to him during his forty days in the desert (cf. 1:13). In the final saying, introduced by “And he said to them,” he tells them solemnly that there are some of those who are standing there who will not taste death until they have seen the kingdom of God coming in power (**9:1**). We may assume that this coming of the kingdom of God is identical with the coming of the Son of Man in glory. This pair of sayings, then, like the first (cf. 8:35), ends with the positive: Jesus’ coming is an event that some will witness. What event Jesus is referring to is disputed. What we can say in the context of the previous teachings is that the disciples who adhere to Jesus even at the cost of their earthly lives will find that death, when it comes, is their means of sharing in the kingdom of God. Death will have become for them their entry into full participation in that family where God’s rule is acknowledged and enjoyed.

Jesus allows a few days for these disturbing new vistas to settle with the disciples. After six days (see below on 9:7) he takes Peter and James and John, the three whom he admitted to the raising of the daughter of Jairus (cf. 5:37), and brings them up a high mountain, themselves alone. And he undergoes “a transformation that is outwardly visible” (Bauer’s explanation of the verb *metamorphōthē*, which has become in English “was transfigured”; **9:2**). There has been some preparation for this change in Jesus’ form in the walking on the water, where he gave the appearance of a ghost (cf. 6:48-49). The divine energy that has been exemplified through so many miracles and authoritative teachings is now permitted to transform the body of Jesus into something like the divine “glory” (cf. 8:38) which is “seen” (cf. 9:1) by the disciples. Jesus has been speaking about his power to give a transcendent life; now he gives the three disciples a visible experience of the glory that is his as Son of God, a vision that is a foretaste of the glory of his risen life and that will sustain them in following the Lord through his Passion and death. While Matthew described the vision in terms of light and the sun, Mark finds a more earthly image: Jesus’ garments become radiant, extremely white, such that no bleacher on earth could ever make them so white (**9:3**). Jesus is seen in heavenly conversation with the two great prophets who enjoyed intimacy with God and called for obedience to him (**9:4**). Elijah, whom Mark mentions first, was taken up to heaven and never seen again

(cf. 2 Kgs 2:11-12, 17); Moses suffered death but his grave was never found (cf. Deut 34: 5-6). These men, one on either side of Jesus, seem to see Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law, the one who will give to God the obedience which men continually failed to give. Jesus sees himself as the new “prophet like Moses” (cf. 6:39-40, Deut 17:15, 18) and as following that Elijah who, like Moses, showed power over the waters (cf. 2 Kgs 2:8, Exod 14:21-22), provided miraculous bread (cf. 1 Kgs 17:13-16, Exod 16:4), and like Jesus’ precursor was persecuted for championing the worship of the true God (cf. 1 Kgs 19:1-2, 10, 14, Mark 9:13; also 6:15, 8:28). The transfiguration is the scene to meditate on for an understanding of the unity of the two Testaments. Jesus is in the line of the two great prophets, or of the representatives of the Law and the Prophets, and at the same time “fulfills” them, brings them to completeness. Christ is the centerpiece of what the Bible is all about.

Peter would like to preserve the vision. He feels “at home” in the presence of the transfigured Master and the prophets who speak with him (9:5). His nature is fulfilled in the vision of Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s plan. He would like to provide tents for the three figures, reminding us of the tent in which Yahweh dwelt enthroned on the ark in the desert wandering (cf. Exod 40:1-3, 16-28, 34-35, Num 17:7-8, 2 Sam 7:6, Ps 27:5-6) and of the tents in which the Israelites dwelt during the feast of Tabernacles (cf. Lev 23:40-43). He does not yet know that the body of the Lord is itself the tent that houses Israel’s God on earth (cf. John 1:14, 2:19-22) and that all men are called to be parts of this dwelling place, living stones in that temple that replaced the tent as God’s dwelling among men (cf. 1 Pet 2:4-5). Just as David was not fit to build a dwelling for God, so Peter will have to let God build the house and make him a part of it, indeed its rock foundation (cf. Matt 16:18). Mark indicates that Peter’s words are not thought out but come from terror in the presence of glory (9:6; the only other occurrence of this word for “terrified” in the New Testament is to describe Moses at the theophany on Sinai, cf. Heb 12:21, quoting Deut 9:19). Matthew places this fear after the Father’s words (cf. Matt 17:6), Luke as the disciples enter the cloud (cf. Luke 9:34).

For a cloud comes, overshadowing the three (9:7a). The cloud suggests benevolent shade, an experience of being surrounded by God but unable to see him, thus offsetting the vision of the radiant Christ. It is a “cloud of unknowing.” A cloud shrouded Yahweh as Moses went into his presence on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:16-18; notice that “for six days the cloud covered [the mountain], and on the seventh day Yahweh called to Moses from inside the cloud” [24:16]; Mark’s “six days” in 9:2 may be an allusion to this Sinai event). The cloud covered the ark and its tent in the desert, signifying the presence of divine glory (cf. Exod 40:34-38). And when Solomon dedicates the Temple he has built, “the cloud filled the Temple of Yahweh,” for in Solomon’s words, “Yahweh has chosen to dwell in the thick cloud” (cf. 1 Kgs 8:10-13). The cloud would be symbolically realized in the billows of incense. As the Lord spoke to Moses from the cloud, so a voice comes from the cloud that overshadows the disciples. God identifies the man who has

been transfigured before them as his Son, the beloved **(9:7b)**. The message that was heard by Jesus alone at his baptism is now addressed to the disciples. What was implicit in Peter's identification of Jesus as the Christ, is now openly stated on this only occasion in the Gospel where God speaks directly to men. Since Jesus has been shown to exhibit divine characteristics, God's testifying to Jesus as "my Son" opens up undreamt of meanings for the term "son of God." Jesus is more than a human being adopted into divine sonship, like the Davidic king; he is son in that he shares his Father's nature. Jesus is experienced as divine son of God without being a distinct God from the Father. The disciples could not understand but only dimly sense something like this. The startling (and for the Jews blasphemous) message that the disciples would preach was that there is a twoness (eventually a threeness) in God, that the man Jesus is genuinely "God from God" in the unity of a single godhead. Having proclaimed Jesus as his Son, the Father has only one command: that the disciples should "listen to him" **(9:7c)**. It is the Father's wish that men acknowledge the lordship of his Son; this is what is meant by faith, which "comes through hearing" (cf. Rom 10:14-17). The disciples must not be like the Pharisees, unwilling to hear the divine invitation in Jesus. They must listen to him even when he tells them difficult things they find it hard to accept (cf. 8:31-38). The new life offered by the Son comes from accepting his word like good soil (cf. 4:8-9, 20). The memory of the transfigured Lord is what will make acceptance of his word possible.

Suddenly looking around they no longer see anyone but Jesus alone with them **(9:8)**. The three disciples have had an overwhelming experience; and since "humankind cannot bear very much reality," they will not be able to keep it in the forefront of their mind, much less understand it, but it will leave an ineffaceable memory that will one day be ever more deeply understood (cf. Peter's recollection of it in 2 Pet 1:16-18). As they come down from the mountain, Jesus orders the three to tell no one what they have seen (cf. 8:30) until the Son of Man (cf. 8:31, 38) has risen from the dead **(9:9)**. This is the second time the disciples have heard Jesus speak of rising after death (cf. 8:31); although they obey his order they discuss among themselves what rising from the dead could mean **(9:10)**. It could only be understood when it had actually happened. Since Jesus has spoken about some future saving act, and has also just been seen speaking with Elijah, the disciples are reminded of a teaching of the scribes that "Elijah must come first" **(9:11)**. The last book of the Old Testament had ended with God's promise to send Elijah the prophet before his "day comes, that great and terrible day." He would turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the hearts of children towards their fathers (Mal 3:23-24). When the disciples ask Jesus about this prophecy, he answers that indeed Elijah will come first to "restore" all things, using the same word the Septuagint had used for "turn [hearts]" **(9:12a)**. Before answering the question about the coming of Elijah, Jesus asks his own question, encouraging the disciples to think about other predictions made about a mysterious figure, whom Jesus identifies with the "Son of Man" (cf. v. 9), who is to "suffer many things and be treated with contempt"

(9:12b). Jesus refers to the Servant of Yahweh, who was to be “despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isa 53:3). The passage reinforces what Jesus has said about his own destiny in the first prophecy of his Passion (cf. 8:31). Jesus is spelling out what was already implied at his baptism when the Father addressed him as the one “in whom I am well pleased” (cf. 1:11), since these were the words addressed to the Servant in the first of the four Songs that celebrate the Servant’s sufferings (cf. Isa 42:1). Indeed, the Father loves the Servant precisely for giving his life, as Jesus will say explicitly in the Gospel of John, “The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again” (John 10:17). Jesus wishes to draw the disciples’ attention to all the Scriptures that are about him (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47). Then he explains that the prophecy about Elijah has already been fulfilled: “I tell you solemnly Elijah has already come, and they did to him whatever they wanted, as is written about him” **(9:13)**. We have seen that John the Baptist was dressed like Elijah (cf. 1:6) and he preached the repentance that could be interpreted as a “turning of hearts” of hostile parties back toward one another. Like Elijah, who suffered persecution from King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, John was imprisoned and then beheaded by King Herod and his wife Herodias (cf. 6:17-29). He was “given up to the will of men” in the phrase Jesus will soon use of himself (cf. 9:31). By identifying John as the one whom God was to send before his “great and terrible day,” Jesus implies that he himself, the one whom John announced, was to bring in that terrible day when judgment would be given on the world (cf. 8:38).

Jesus now performs his last miracle in Galilee. It will be at once a vivid expulsion of a demon and a healing of grievous physical ills caused by the demon. It will have behind it the new revelation of Jesus as beloved Son of God who is destined somehow to suffer and rise from the dead. At the same time Jesus will indicate what qualities the disciples will need if they are to perform miracles in their turn. The story is told in typical Marcan fashion with rich and graphic detail and emotional dialogue. It occupies sixteen verses in Mark’s Gospel as against seven in Matthew. Jesus and the three disciples approach the other disciples and see a large crowd around them and some scribes arguing with them **(9:14)**. Already Mark has identified four groups in what is to be a lively scene. Immediately on seeing Jesus the whole crowd are greatly surprised and running up to him greet him **(9:15)**. When he asks what they were arguing about **(9:16)**, a man emerges from the crowd (it is only here that Matthew begins his account) and tells the “teacher” that he brought his son to him to be healed of a “dumb spirit,” that is, a demon who prevents the son from speaking **(9:17)**. Whenever the demon seizes the him, it throws him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes stiff **(9:18a)**. This is the first of four descriptions of the young man’s torment. In the absence of Jesus himself the man asked his disciples to cast out the demon but they were powerless **(9:18b)**. Jesus’ first words seem addressed to the unsuccessful disciples, whom he had

empowered to cast out demons as early as 3:15 and sent out to do so in 6:7. He upbraids them as a “faithless (cf. 6:6) generation” (cf. 8:12, 38), asking how long he will be with them, how long will he have to put up with them **(9:19a)**. This is the same exasperation he showed at the disciples’ failure to remember his power to provide bread (cf. 8:17-21). The disciples still lack faith in the limitless power of Jesus over all that threatens human life. He orders the boy to be brought to him **(9:19b)**. Upon seeing Jesus, the spirit immediately convulses the boy, who falling to the ground rolls and foams at the mouth **(9:20)**; seizure not in Matthew). To add to the pathos of the scene, Mark has Jesus ask the father how long this has been happening to him; he replies since earliest childhood **(9:21)** and gives our third description of the malady: very often the demon throws the boy into fire and water to destroy him **(9:22a)**. The father now makes his urgent plea: “But if you are able, help us, taking pity on us” **(9:22b)**. His words remind us that behind Jesus’ works is compassion for the suffering of men (cf. 1:41, 6:34).

Jesus picks up on the father’s first words, “If you are able,” declaring that all things are possible to one who believes **(9:23)**. The passage is important for underlining the single virtue that Jesus requires in man, namely faith (cf. 1:15, 2:5, 4:40, 5:34, 36, 6:6, 9:19), and for showing faith’s limitless power. The father of the child confesses his faith but asks the Lord to help (cf. vs. 22) his lack of faith **(9:24)**; cf. 9:19). The man is no different from the disciples: he believes in the power of Jesus but knows that his faith needs to be stronger, freer of doubt and hesitation. Jesus will stress this aspect of faith in his teaching in Jerusalem (cf. 11:23-24). Seeing the crowd running together, Jesus rebukes (cf. 1:25, 3;12, 4:39) the unclean spirit with a formal adjuration: “Deaf [a new detail] and dumb spirit, I command you, come out from him and never enter him again” **(9:25)**. Crying out and again convulsing the boy (cf. 1:26) the spirit departs, leaving the boy so like one dead that many say that he is dead **(9:26)**. Mark has twice underlined the appearance of death so that he can twice describe the boy’s recovery with verbs that are used for resurrection. Taking the boy’s hand (cf. 1:31, 5:41, 8:23), Jesus “raises him up” (cf. 6:14-16) and “he rises” (cf. 8:31, 9:9; **9:27**). When Jesus goes into the house (not clear which house since the location of the miracle is not mentioned), Jesus’ disciples ask him by themselves (cf. 4:10, 34, 7:17) why they were not able to expel the demon **(9:28)**. He answers that this kind of demon can only be driven out by prayer **(9:29)**. Since he earlier chastised them about lack of faith, we can assume that faith and prayer are related. The disciples must first believe in the power of Jesus over evil and then earnestly ask God to apply that power in the given situation. He will make the same connection between prayer and faith in 11:22-24. Jesus has given an example of prayer as communion with his Father (cf. 1:35, 6:46); here he refers more to the prayer of petition. Matthew’s account of the miracle ends with a lesson of Jesus on faith rather than on prayer (cf. Matt 17:19-20).

Leaving the place Jesus and his disciples go through Galilee, and he does not wish anyone to know it **(9:30)**. Throughout this Gospel he has wanted to avoid the kind of publicity that reflects a misunderstanding of his ministry.

Besides, his task now is to deepen the true understanding of his mission among his disciples. Again he teaches them that the Son of Man is being delivered (note present tense) into the hands of men and they will kill him, and three days after he is killed he will rise again (**9:31**, cf. 8:31). They do not understand the teaching but are afraid to ask him about it (**9:32**) either because he has more than once berated their lack of understanding or because they understand what he is saying but fear to lose him.

They come to Capernaum. Having heard the disciples arguing on the way, Jesus asks what they were discussing (**9:33**). They are silent, having been discussing with one another on the way (note repetition) who was the greatest (**9:34**). Their silence indicates their embarrassment, the sense that the Master will not approve of this discussion. Showing his knowledge of the conversation, Jesus uses the occasion to sit down and call together “the twelve” (not mentioned since 6:7) for a solemn teaching (**9:35a**). If anyone wishes to be first, he will become the last of all and the servant of all (**9:35b**). Here is one more mystery for the twelve to ponder. It is like the paradoxes about losing one’s life to save it (cf. 8:35). The saying would not yet make sense to the apostles because Jesus has not yet expressed his mission in terms of being a servant of all. He has only suggested his identity as the “Servant of the Lord” described by Isaiah. In fact, that figure is a servant of men as well as of God in that he brings justice to the earth (cf. Isa 42:1-4), light to the nations (Isa 42:6-7, 49:6), bears the sins of others and a punishment that brings them peace and healing (Isa 53:5) and justification (Isa 53:11). Jesus in fact does nothing for himself, nothing for his glory. His goal is to “save life” (cf. 3:4), to free men from Satan (cf. 3:27), to pity and teach the sheep without a shepherd (cf. 6:34), to pity and feed the hungry (cf. 8:2). This selfless service will be the subject of special teaching in the following chapter. Here Jesus focuses more on the themes of “first” and “last.” He performs a prophetic gesture in which a little child becomes the focus of teaching. He places a child in their midst and embraces him (**9:36**), indicating his love for the needy, for those who are dependent. He seems to be inviting the disciples to be like children, not seeking aggrandizement but willing to depend on their Father for their needs. In fact, he is here asking the disciples not to be children so much as to welcome those “children” who are the needy whom they encounter. As Jesus demonstrates love for the needy, so must they, if they wish to “receive” him and be united to him. Receiving any needy person in the name of Christ, that is, because Christ asks them to do so, will be their way of welcoming not only Christ but the Father “who sent” him (**9:37**), a Johannine expression not found elsewhere in Mark. But to welcome the needy, the “child,” in this way is also to be like a child oneself because one is not lording it over the child but being “less,” serving him. To be a child is to serve, to be governed by the needs of others, and to serve is to be “first” or “great.” Jesus is inviting the disciples to achieve greatness by following him in ministering to the needy. To welcome them is to welcome him; to welcome him is to welcome not merely him but the Father whose envoy he is. Those who are willing to serve the needy in union with Christ

will be raised with him in “the glory of [his] Father” (cf. 8:38). There can be no greater greatness than to welcome God into oneself, becoming identified with him. We welcome God by allowing the Spirit of his Son to shape our actions.

Saint Mark uses the opportunity of this teaching session to include other teachings of the Lord, mostly joined by word-links. Picking up on the expression “in my name” from 9:37, the disciple John tells the Master that he and the others saw someone casting out demons in Jesus’ name, one who did not follow Jesus, and they prevented him since he did not follow Jesus (**9:38**). Jesus answers that the man should not be prevented, since no one who performs a miracle in his name is likely to turn around and speak ill of him (**9:39**). Faith in Jesus’ name is what is essential to be “on Jesus’ side.” If one is not against Jesus and his followers, then he is for them (**8:40**). Allegiance to Jesus becomes the touchstone of union with God or separation from him; there is no middle ground. It is faith in Jesus that gives power to cast out the demons (cf. 9:24, 29). Even to give a cup of water to a disciple “in the name that you are of Christ” is a way of associating oneself with Christ; Jesus solemnly declares that such a person will not lose his reward (**8:41**). Again, to receive the needy is to receive Christ who is identified with the needy because he cares about them. To receive the needy is to receive Christ; to receive Christ is to receive the needy. In all these cases the disciple is defined in terms of relationship to others and to Christ, not in terms of being “first” or “greatest.”

The disciples are “little ones” because they trust not in themselves but “believe” in Christ, relying on him for life. They belong to Christ so closely that any harm done to them is done to him and puts one right outside his fellowship. Jesus expresses the direness of this harm done to his “little ones” in the most violent of his sayings: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to sin would be better off if a millstone is hung around his neck and he is thrown into the sea” (**9:42**). The believer is identified with Christ: to separate him from Christ is to separate oneself from Christ and that is the equivalent of eternal death. The sea is the place where evil is swallowed up (cf. 5:13, Exod 14:26-28, 15:1, 4-5, 10-12, 19-21, Pss 78:53, 106:11, 136:15). The language of Jesus is a testimony to the power of the bond of love uniting him to the “believer,” the “little one,” the “child.” Jesus has more to say on the subject of “causing to sin” (lit. “scandalizing”). He recognizes that different parts of a man (hand, foot, eye) can cause him to sin: these must be amputated or plucked out rather than be allowed to cause the man to reject God (**9:43, 45, 47**). The language is extreme and metaphorical—a man must cut off sinful tendencies even at great cost to his comfort and well-being in this world, must be prepared to be “impaired,” “lame,” “having only one eye”—but the point is one Jesus makes continually: the “will of God” (cf. 3:35) must have priority over all other considerations (cf. 8:35, 36). One must be prepared for sacrifice to enter into “life” (9:43, 45) and “the kingdom of God” (9:47). To hold onto earthly comforts at the expense of allegiance to God wins entrance to “gehenna” (cf. Matt 5:22), “where the worm never dies nor is the fire extinguished” (**9:48**, a quotation of the last verse of the book of Isaiah, Isa

66:24; the saying is added also after verses 43 and 45 in some manuscripts, constituting verses **44** and **46**). Jesus has another mysterious saying about fire: “For everything is to be salted with fire” (**9:49**). The life of discipleship is one of purification, often painful, as Jesus’ recent sayings have stressed. Fire is a good image for this purification, and trials give “salt” or seasoning to one’s life, keeping it from corruption. This saying in turn suggests two more sayings about salt. “If salt is deprived of its salt content, with what will it be seasoned?” (**9:50a**). The Christian must never lose his edge, become complacent; there must be a zest about his life. Finally, Jesus gives a particular result of being “seasoned” with salt: “Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another” (**9:50b**). Fellowship with Jesus must produce fellowship among his believers. What better ending could there be to a teaching session that began with an argument among the disciples about who was “greatest”?

Jesus has won a good following in Galilee. Now it is time to visit Judea and the center of Jewish religion, Jerusalem. He arrives in the region of Judea, probably after traveling “on the other side of the Jordan” and again is met by crowds whom he again teaches according to his custom (**10:1**). Here again Pharisees come to test him (cf. 8:11). They have asked about association with sinners, sabbath observance, ceremonial washings; now they ask if a man may divorce his wife (**10:2**). Jesus’ answer is important less as an instance of dispute with the Pharisees, who are not further mentioned in the story, than as laying down a fundamental principle of life in his Church. He asks the Pharisees how they read the Law on this subject (**10:3**). They answer that Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and dismiss the woman. (**10:4**; cf. Deut 24:1). But Jesus makes bold to declare that this particular precept is not what God intends; it was on account of “the hardness of your hearts” that Moses wrote it (**10:5**). He is claiming to know the mind of God and to relativize precepts of the Law. Something can be permitted because of the people’s hardness of heart; but if that hardness can be mended, then the precept (or concession) will no longer apply. In taking away the sin of man Jesus will make it possible for men to keep God’s original law, which is the one he made “from the creation of the world” when “‘he made them male and female’ [**10:6**, Gen 1:27]. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother [**10:7**] and the two will become one flesh’ [cf. Gen 2:24], so that they are no longer two but one flesh” (**10:8**). Jesus restores God’s original plan and legislates succinctly, “Therefore what God has joined, man must not divide” (**10:9**). Jesus does not give an opinion but asserts authoritatively the divine will. He has “taught with authority” from the beginning (cf. 1:22) but now he assumes the authority to proclaim divine legislation. Later “inside the house,” the disciples question Jesus about the teaching (**10:10**), which seems to disturb them. Jesus only reiterates what he has said in a different form: Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her (**10:11**); and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery (**10:12**). He gives no further explanation or commentary. One can begin to sense the force of his words about the disciple having to “carry his cross” and “lose his life.”

In the prohibition against divorce the cross becomes real. Questions about the psychological maturity necessary for a making a lifetime commitment did not arise in the Gospel but need not be incompatible with Jesus' assertion of the permanence of a true marriage.

After Jesus' teaching on marriage it seems appropriate to have a passage about children. People brought children to Jesus so that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them (**10:13**; cf. 8:32). Seeing this, Jesus becomes indignant and tells them to allow the children to come to him and not to prevent them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven (**10:14**). Again the disciples are confounded; it is the insignificant ones, not the great, that Jesus has time for. In this teaching the child is the model of the disciple, who must receive the kingdom of God as a gift and cannot achieve it on his own strength (**10:15**). The teaching on the little child in 9:36-37 focused on accepting rather than on being the child, but as we saw, both passages come to the same thing. A man must reverse the sin of Adam and Eve, the rejection of dependence on God in search of full autonomy, by returning to the father and acknowledging one's dependence on and need for him. As before, Jesus embraces the children and blesses them, placing his hands on them (**10:16**). Both Jesus' indignation and his embrace are typical traits of the Marcan Jesus not mentioned in the parallel accounts of Matthew and Luke (cf. Matt 19:13-15, Luke 18:15-17).

As he was setting out on the road, a man running up (cf. 9:15) and kneeling before him (cf. 1:40; both participles only in Mark) asked him, "Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (**10:17**). This is the first time the expression "eternal life" has been encountered in Mark (cf. Dan 12:2); "life" alone was given as the disciple's destiny in 9:43 and 45. The questioner seems to expect that Jesus was offering this kind of life, that the "inheriting" of it required some special deed(s) on man's part, and that Jesus knew what these deeds were. Before answering, Jesus first comments on the epithet "good" given him by the man (cf. 9:11-13 where Jesus similarly makes his own comment before answering a question). Why does the man call Jesus "good"? No one is good but God alone (**10:18**). Men can participate in goodness, but God alone *is* goodness and is therefore the only one who can define what goodness is for men. If Jesus makes that point and then goes on to say what it is good for man to do to attain life, then he is (once again) assuming divine knowledge and authority. His answer will be in two stages: in the first he will summarize the Old Testament answer to the question; in the second he will define what is distinctly new in his teaching. He reminds the man of the ten commandments, mentioning specifically the fifth through eighth and the fourth (cf. Exod 20:13-16, 12 and Deut 5:17-20, 16), adding before the last another word for "do not steal" (**10:19**). The commandments were a "pedagogy" (cf. Gal 3:24) given to man to point him in the direction of a life in conformity with the will of God, a life centered on respect for the lives of other persons. But as Paul will emphasize, the works enjoined by the Law could not make one pleasing to God because the Law did not give the power to keep the Law (cf. Gal 2:16, 3:2, 5, 11-12, Rom 3:28). Sin was master

everywhere (cf. Gal 3:21-22), so that man needed something besides the Law, which only defined or specified what was sinful. The questioner suspects this to be the case: he has kept all the commandments since his youth (**10:20**) but senses that more is required. Jesus looks on him and “loves” him (only in Mark’s account); the person who is searching for that “more” is the one whom Jesus can and wishes to help (cf. his embrace of the “child[ren]” in 9:36 and 10:16).

The man is ready for the second stage of Jesus’ answer. He still lacks one thing: he must go, sell whatever things he has and give to the poor, for which he will have treasure in heaven, and come follow Jesus (**10:21**). Once again we have the extremism of Jesus: the kingdom of God which he is bringing in must become a man’s top priority, requiring even the sacrifice of earthly goods (cf. 8:34-37, 9:43-47). If Jesus alone is the one who forgives the sin which is man’s obstacle to life, then a commitment to him as one’s first priority is the way that leads to life. Jesus’ words here are meant for all men and women, who must let go of what keeps them from Christ. But there will always be some Christians who choose to follow these words of Jesus even literally, making Christ their first priority by dispossessing themselves of goods in order to be totally available to him. These persons who have consecrated themselves to the following of Jesus give to the whole Church a striking symbol of the sacrifice that is required in any Christian life. For this reason Christ’s words to this potential disciple are also a special invitation to a radical following of the Lord that makes him not only one’s first but one’s only priority. Our man (called “young” only in Matt 19:20, 22) becomes gloomy (used elsewhere in the NT only once to designate a lowering sky, cf. Matt 16:3) at this word and goes away sorrowful, for he owned many possessions (**10:22**).

Jesus uses the event to teach another difficult lesson. Looking around (Mark only), he says to his disciples, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God” (**10:23**). Wealth preoccupies a person with this world’s goods and may lead him to forget that his true happiness is beyond what this world provides (cf. 8:35-36, 43-47). When the disciples are astounded (cf. 1:27) at these words, Jesus repeats them, addressing the disciples as “children” (**10:24**) and then expressing the same truth in an image that the whole world now knows: it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (**10:25**). Three times in as many verses Jesus has mentioned the “kingdom of God,” the subject of his preaching from the beginning (cf. 1:15, 4:11, 26, 30, 9:1, 47, 10:14, 15). The term represents the same reality as “eternal life” and “salvation,” as becomes clear in the next verse when the disciples, exceedingly amazed, ask one another, “Then who can be saved?” (**10:26**). Looking at them, Jesus says, “For men it is impossible, but not for God; for all things are possible for God” (**10:27**; cf. the same idea in Gen 18:14, Job 42:2, Zech 8:6 LXX, also Luke 1:37). Jesus is the one who makes it possible for a man to make the kingdom of God is first priority. After that, wealth and possessions become relative. If one is attached to the Lord and detached from them, one can use the things of this world in an appropriate way or not use

them; what matters is the seeking first the kingdom of God (cf. Matt 6:33), serving God rather than mammon (cf. Matt 6:24). Men need the redemption from sin which Jesus brings in order to choose God above self.

Peter points out that the disciples have done just what Jesus has asked of the rich man; they have left all things and followed him (**10:28**). Peter and Andrew “left” their nets to follow him (cf. 1:18); James and John “left” their father and his boat (cf. 1:20). Peter’s observation gives Jesus the opportunity to give the positive side of eschewing wealth: he tells them solemnly that no one who has left house or family or fields for his sake and that of the gospel (**10:29**) will not receive a hundredfold now in the present time houses and family and fields along with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life (cf. 10:17; **10:30**). Renouncing the ultimate claim of creatures in favor of God in Christ makes possible a whole new relationship with creatures, one which is less possessive and which respects, even enjoys their relationship to God. This saying complements the lesson about renunciation by pointing out the overflowing reward of this renunciation. One becomes poor in order to become rich with true riches, not just in this life but above all in eternal life. Nevertheless, renunciation will always entail suffering in this world, since human sin is always pulling men away from their allegiance to God. Men will enjoy hundredfold riches in this world along with suffering, persecutions, and even the cross. Mark places here a saying which sums up so much of what Jesus has taught since Peter’s confession: many who are first will be last and the last first (**10:31**; cf. 8:36, 9:35, 43-47, 10:9, 15, 21, 23-25, 29-30).

Since arriving in Judea (cf. 10:1) Jesus has given some of his most important teaching. He now strides resolutely toward Jerusalem, as if anxious to demonstrate in his own life the need to lose one’s life in order to find it. Mark portrays the procession and its attendant emotions: Jesus goes before them, and they are astounded, and his followers are afraid (**10:32a**). It does not seem that anything good will happen to him in the holy city. As if to give form to their fears, Jesus again takes the Twelve aside and begins to tell them the things that are about to happen to him (**10:32b**). This he does with much more detail than in the earlier predictions of his Passion (cf. 8:31, 9:31). “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes [9:31 had only “delivered into the hands of men”], and they will condemn him to death and hand him over to the gentiles [**10:33**], and they will mock him and spit upon him and scourge and kill him, and after three days he will rise again [**10:34**].” In seven verbs Jesus gives an accurate prediction of the stages of his rejection by men, first by the leaders of his own religion, then by the pagans. The legal, psychological, and physical attacks against him are all included. The prediction ends as did the others with the prediction of resurrection, but this verb will not have had for the apostles the force of the other verbs, since it referred to something they had never experienced. Jesus moves toward his fate as complete master of it.

Two of Jesus' favored disciples, James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, seem to care less about the coming death of their master than about their position in the kingdom he is going to establish. They want him to do their will: "Master, we wish that whatever we ask you you will do for us" (10:35). That is the attitude of the man who has not yet given up control to God but tries to bend God to his own will. Their prayer is "My will be done," not "Your will be done." Jesus asks what they want him to do (10:36). They have heard the part of Jesus' message about "glory" (cf. 8:38) and ask that they may sit on either side of the Lord in that glory (10:37). After patiently pointing out that they don't understand what they are asking for, Jesus asks if they can drink the cup he will drink or be baptized with the baptism with which he will be baptized (10:38). The "cup" is an Old Testament image for the destiny that awaits one (cf. on Matt 20:22). "Baptism" would be a familiar term since the ministry of John the Baptist, who invited people to be immersed in the Jordan River as a sign of repentance for their sins. Baptism would be an allowing of the waters of death to wash over one as a sign that he wished to be purified of his sins. The disciples must know that Jesus himself was baptized by John. When he refers to a baptism which he must still undergo, he is saying in metaphor exactly what he has just taught the disciples, namely that he is to die, rejected by all. James and John could not have well understood this since they blithely reply, "We can." Jesus replies that such indeed will be their fate (10:39), but that is no guarantee that they will obtain favored places in the kingdom: the allotting of these places is not Jesus' task but has been "prepared" for certain individuals by another (10:40; note awkwardness of construction). The disciples do not realize that Jesus is not an independent leader who is free to make his own decisions but is carrying out the will of his Father. This is the meaning of the verb "it is necessary" (*dei*) which governed the first prediction of the Passion: it is necessary that the Christ should suffer because God has willed it so. Jesus has shown himself committed not to his own school of teaching or his own program but to the will of his Father (cf. 7:8-13, 8:33, 10:5-9). Anyone who purports to "follow" him must be prepared for the same obedience. James and John are still thinking in man's way not God's (cf. 8:33).

The other ten disciples are indignant with James and John for seeking higher positions than themselves, perhaps also because they wanted such positions themselves (10:41). The incident is another opportunity for Jesus to explain the difference between his kingdom and earthly kingdoms. His words will be addressed as much to the two ambitious brothers as to the ten who were angry at them. Calling them together, he points out a well-known feature of pagan rule: those who are considered rulers lord it over their subjects and their great ones tyrannize over them (10:42). Power is interpreted as the right to force others to do one's will. It is not like that in Jesus' community; rather whoever wants to become great among them will be servant of all (10:43), and whoever wishes to be first among them will be slave of all (10:44). The second statement is close to 9:35, omitting the adjective "last" and replacing the noun "servant"

(*diakonos*) with “slave” (*doulos*). The first statement picks up on the language of “great ones” (cf. previous verse) and uses the “servant” of 9:35. Clearly Jesus is emphasizing the idea of service, both that of “ministering” to others in an official way and that of being available to do another’s bidding. Jesus has turned upside down human preconceptions of authority. The leader’s task is to minister to the needs of the others, even to be their slave. This could not be an appealing vocation for the Twelve until it became clear to them that this kind of leadership was exactly what their Master would exemplify. Jesus would not force others to do his will but would give his life in order to minister life to them. He would become the slave of others (cf. Phil 2:7). Jesus explains this in his last sentence: For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (**10:45**). The divine thing is to give generously, not to take, and Jesus’ disciples must learn this higher kind of authority. With the word “ransom” Jesus goes to the heart of his mission. The life that he must give up is a payment to God that will remove human sin. God required no “payment” for man in order to forgive him, but man had to make the return journey back to God if he was to be forgiven. Jesus as man did for men what they could not do themselves. This is the meaning of the term “redemption,” and in undertaking this task for mankind Jesus was once again fulfilling the prophecy of the Servant of Yahweh (cf. Isa 53:10-11; cf. Mark 1:11, 2:20, 9:12). The terrible verse is a remarkable ending to the teaching given by Jesus to his disciples from the time of Peter’s confession. It both summarizes and explains Jesus’ own destiny as he has been trying to foretell it and shows how discipleship means a sharing in his own pattern of sacrifice. The divine self-sacrifice was the secret that Jesus was preparing men to grasp; his frequent injunctions to silence were to ward off a misunderstanding of this mystery through a too human understanding of kingship.

As he nears Jerusalem Jesus performs his last healing miracle. Like the miracle before Peter’s confession it is a healing of blindness, perhaps symbolizing the need for healing of the disciples’ spiritual sight so as to be able to understand the mystery of his coming passion and death. They pass through Jericho, and as Jesus and his disciples and a sizable crowd leave the town, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, is sitting by the road (**10:46**). The account is close to Matthew’s with a few exceptions: Mark has only one blind man, to whom he gives a name and who is also a beggar. The man calls Jesus by name (the only instance of this in Mark) rather than addressing him as “lord” (**10:47**). Mark reports the consoling words of those who call the blind man, “Take courage, get up, he is calling you” (**10:49**), and only he describes the man’s enthusiastic reaction: “Throwing off his cloak and jumping up, he came to Jesus” (**10:50**). The man’s response to Jesus’ question is more straightforward than that of the two men in Matthew: “Rabbi (cf. Aramaic words in 5:41, 7:11, 34), that I may see again” (**10:51**). Mark does not have Matthew’s “taking pity on him” (found in Mark 1:41, 6:34, 8:2, 9:22) and replaces the healing by touch with the simple words “Go, your faith has saved you” (**10:52**). Mark had already reported

a healing of blindness by touch (cf. 8:25), and Jesus' final statement repeats his saying to the woman cured of a hemorrhage (cf. 5:34). The man has shown his faith especially by persisting in calling for help after being rebuffed, a feature of the Canaanite woman in Matthew's Gospel where she too is commended by Jesus for her faith (cf. Matt 15:22-28.). The man's familiar use of Jesus' name along with the Messianic title "Son of David" demonstrates at once the suppliant's confidence and reverence and serves as a model for Christian prayer. Jesus cannot refuse a prayer that comes from an existential awareness of his identity.

The last word of Chapter 10, "the way," leads smoothly into the first event of the following Chapter. Jesus has initiated his mission among the poor country folk of Galilee, a group often despised by the Jerusalem Jews as ignorant of the Law (cf. John 1:46, 7:41, 52). Ultimately he must bring his message to the holy city with its Temple and leading officials. Having arrived at Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives (**11:1**), he must make it clear that his entry into the city is a solemn visitation, the entry of its king. He has the disciples go into a village facing them where they will find a tethered colt on which no man has yet sat; they are to untie it and bring it (**11:2**). Mark takes four verses to give the dialogue between the envoys and those who see what they are doing: Jesus predicts the dialogue (**11:3**) and then it happens (**11:5-6**; cf. Matt 20:3, 6). Mark adds the detail that they find the animal "by a door outside on the street" (**11:4**). The disciples bring the animal and, knowing that Jesus intends to use it as a mount, place their cloaks on it and he sits on it (**11:7**). Many strew their cloaks on the road, others strew leafy branches which they have cut in the fields (**11:8**). Although Mark has not cited Zech 9:9 (cf. Matt 20:4-5), the colt would be a clear sign of a royal mount. The people indicate their awareness of the royal character of this entry by going before and after him crying words of a psalm that accompanied the procession of a king to the Temple: "Hosanna; blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord" (**11:9**; cf. Ps 118:25-26). Mark keeps the Hebrew of the acclamation (cf. 10:51), repeating it at the end with the addition "in the highest," and inserting before the repeated Hosanna the statement "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our Father David" (**11:10**). The "Son of David" twice addressed in the previous story (cf. 10:47-48) is seen as ushering in the everlasting reign promised to David's descendants (cf. 2 Sam 7:16, Ps 89:4-5, 30, 37-38). By throwing their cloaks on the ground in front of Jesus men signify their submission to him as king. Jesus' destination is the Temple; whereas Matthew places here the cleansing of the temple, Mark simply speaks of Jesus "looking around at everything" and reserves the cleansing for the following day. Since the hour is already late, Jesus goes out to Bethany with the twelve (**11:11**).

The next day as they leave Bethany Mark reports that Jesus is hungry (**11:12**). In fact Jesus is preparing another sign. Seeing a fig tree with leaves in the distance, he goes to see whether he can find anything on it, but coming upon it he finds only leaves, for it is not the season for figs (**11:13**). The absence of figs elicits Jesus' curse: "May no one ever eat fruit from you again" (**11:14a**). The symbolic meaning of the curse is clear from the fact that fruit could not be

expected at that time of year. Jesus already knows, from “looking around at everything” in the temple and from meeting Pharisees from Jerusalem, that he is not going to find the fruit of good works in the city but only the leaves of the outward show of holiness. In the same way in Isaiah the Lord did not find good fruit in his vineyard and had to destroy it (Isa 5:1-7). Jesus’ curse on mere outward observance without the fruit of justice and good works sums up much of the long denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:5-7, 13-32. Jesus’ disciples hear and will remember his curse **(11:14b)**.

Mark’s account of the cleansing of the temple **(11:15-19)** is close to Matthew’s, except for the day on which it occurred (see on 11:11; cf. Matt 21:12-17). He adds to the prophetic actions of Jesus the forbidding of anyone to carry a vessel through the temple **(11:16)** and speaks of Jesus “teaching” in the temple **(11:17a)**. Where Matthew tells of the indignation of the chief priests and scribes at Jesus’ healings in the temple and the praise he is receiving, Mark says it was his “teaching” that made them seek to destroy him; but they feared him, for the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching **(11:18)** as the crowds have been from the beginning in Galilee (cf. 1:22, 6:2). As the day becomes late, they leave the city **(11:19)** as on the previous evening (cf. 11:11).

On the third day in Jerusalem, as they are walking along they see the fig tree withered from the roots **(11:20)**. Peter remembers that this was the tree Jesus had cursed the previous morning (cf. 11:14) and points it out to the Rabbi **(11:21)**; in Matthew the tree withers as soon as Jesus curses it). Instead of commenting on the meaning of the cursed and withered tree, Jesus is eager to explain how the apostles can share the same divine power manifested in this action. The only thing they require is “faith in God” (or the “faith of God”, **11:22**). One with a sure faith that does not “waver” is convinced that God is on the side of the disciple and will eliminate any obstacle between the disciple and himself. Faith puts one in touch with the power of God, which can do the impossible (cf. 10:27), symbolized by the ordering of “this mountain” to be picked up and thrown into the sea **(11:23)**. A disciple who believes he already has what he asks for in prayer, will certainly receive it **(11:24)**. The healing of the blind man at Jericho has just demonstrated the power of prayer grounded in this faith. Jesus here assumes that the prayer of the disciple is not for some contingent benefit but for the ultimate good, that is, one’s salvation, which is precisely what the Father wills (cf. 1 Tim 2:4). It is ultimately the obstacle of sin that is eliminated by a heartfelt prayer of faith to the risen Lord. Sin will be “cast into the sea” to be destroyed (cf. 5:13) until the day when the sea itself “is no more” (Rev 21:1). This is the last teaching of Jesus on faith until after the resurrection. Having moved from faith to prayer, Jesus now gives a way for the disciples to test whether their prayer is truly authentic, that is, in harmony with the will of God. If when they “stand” in prayer they let go of resentment at any offense caused them by another, then they are aligning themselves with the forgiving will of their “Father in heaven” and will find their own sins forgiven **(11:25)**. Mark gives in one verse Jesus’ teaching

about the children being like their father, which Matthew presents at greater length in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt 5:44-48, 6:9-15).

And so they come again into Jerusalem. Mark's account of Jesus' final debates with the Jerusalem officials is very close to Matthew's. Jesus is "walking" in the temple when approached by the chief priests and scribes and elders (11:27) inquiring about his authority for doing "these things" and about the source of power (11:28). "These things" must refer primarily to the prophetic actions Jesus has performed since coming to Jerusalem, that is, the royal entrance procession and the cleansing of the temple, but the report of his healings has also come to the hearing of the leaders. Jesus expects that his deeds are self-authenticating: it is indisputable that they are in line with the will of God. They call for faith not discussion or proof. Therefore his reply to the question is to ask his own question (11:29). Whence came the authority of John the Baptist? Was he of divine or merely human origin? (11:30). Instead of giving their own opinion and accepting the consequences, they consider only how they might retain their hold on power. The alternatives are either to acknowledge both John and Jesus as coming from God, and therefore to believe in them (11:31), or to deny that John was from God, thereby provoking the hostility of the crowd, who held John to be a prophet and whom the leaders therefore "feared" (just as they "feared" Jesus after the temple-cleansing, cf. 11:18) as a threat to their own authority (11:32). The leaders remind one of the "rulers of the pagans" who are more interested in exerting power over others than in serving people's real needs (cf. 10:42-45). By choosing not to answer Jesus' question, they remain without an answer to their own question (11:33).

Jesus has won the first debate by putting the ball back in the opponents' court. He now delivers the parable that situates his own ministry as the culmination of the history of the chosen people and the beginning of a new people of God. While Mark says that Jesus begins to speak "in parables" (12:1a), he gives only this one parable while Matthew gives three. The parable is directed at the Jerusalem officials, the "tenants" to whom God has entrusted his "vineyard" (12:1b) so that it may bring forth the fruit of justice (cf. Isa 5:1-7, Ps 81:9-14, Jer 2:21, 8:13). Jesus now proclaims publicly what he demonstrated to the apostles in the cursing of the fig tree: the chosen people, and in particular their leaders, have not brought forth the fruit of obedience which their God expected; hence they are to be rejected. Whereas Matthew has two "sendings" of groups of servants to collect the produce before the sending of the son, Mark has five sendings: a single servant who is beaten and sent away empty-handed (12:2-3; not killed as in Matthew), a second who is "struck on the head and dishonored" (12:4), a third who is killed (12:5a), then many others, some of whom are beaten and some killed (12:5b), and finally the "beloved" son (cf. 1:11), who is killed and then thrown out of the vineyard (12:6-8; Matthew reverses the last two verbs to conform to the death of Jesus outside the city). Jesus answers his own question about what the owner of the vineyard will do, instead of eliciting the answer from his opponents as in Matthew (12:9). His quotation of Psalm 118:22-23 follows

immediately (**12:10-11**) without a reference to “tenants who will yield for him the produce in the proper time” (cf. Matt 21: 41), nor does Jesus give the clear explanation found in Matthew: “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a race who brings forth its fruit” (Matt 21:43). Finally, reversing the order of Matthew, Mark gives the reaction of the officials followed by the reason for the reaction: they seek to arrest Jesus and fear the crowd (cf. 11:32), for they know that the parable is directed at them (**12:12**). Jesus has again frustrated the leaders, who leave him and go away. The envoy of God who sought faith and repentance will be killed by the authorities only to become the foundation of a new people.

The officials now send groups from two different parties, the Pharisees and the Herodians, to “catch” him in an “unguarded” statement (**12:13**; the verb occurs only here in the NT, as does the verb “entrap” in the parallel passage, Matt 22:15). Mark’s version of the encounter is virtually the same as Matthew’s. With oily words the questioners twice refer to Jesus as a “teacher,” twice say that he adheres to “truth,” and twice underline that he doesn’t try to please men but teaches the “way of God” (**12:14a**); they even ask their question about tribute to Caesar twice (**12:14b**). Jesus immediately sees through the “hypocrisy” (cf. 7:6) and accuses them of “testing” him (**12:15**; cf. 8:11, 10:2). He shows the truth of the flatterers’ words by making no effort to please them. The device of having the emperor’s coin produced along with Jesus’ double question about the coin (**12:16**) makes a profound spiritual truth concrete. The coin is Caesar’s and so is the current political authority over Judea. It might be part of the will of God that his chosen people be free of pagan domination, but the essence of the divine will is quite different (**12:17a**). It is first of all an obedience to the commandments (cf. 3:35, 7:9-13, 10:6-9, 19, 12:28-34) and ultimately an acknowledgement of Jesus as the envoy of God and a willingness to “follow” (cf. 10:21) him in faith (cf. 10:52, 11:22, 31). The interlocutors have not been able to distinguish the essential will of God from a secondary aspect of the divine plan, just as earlier the Pharisees had placed their own minor dietary laws above the direct commandment of God. The hearers “wonder mightily” at Jesus (**12:17b**, verb used only here in the NT).

Another party, the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, come with a question designed to show the absurdity of Jesus’ teaching about rising from the dead (**12:18**), a teaching so far given only to the disciples but now apparently generally known (cf. 8:31, 9:31, 10:30, 34). Again the story closely parallels Matthew’s version (**12:19-23**). Jesus’ answer to the proposed dilemma is framed as a question: “Do you not err because you understand neither the scriptures nor the power of God?” (**12:24**). What the Sadducees have not realized is that the destiny of each man and woman is a personal relationship with God that will utterly fulfill the human longing for communion. God has the “power” to raise men and women to a communion with himself similar to that of the angels (**12:25**). As for the scriptures, God’s words to Moses in the burning bush imply that if he is at the moment the God of patriarchs who lived centuries earlier (**12:26**), they must

still be alive, that is, risen from the dead, since he is “not a God of the dead but of the living” (**12:27a**). The passage is susceptible of that interpretation, but Jesus declares that it is the right interpretation and that the Sadducees have failed to understand the full force of the passage (**12:27b**). Mark does not give, as Matthew does, the reaction of the crowds to this teaching (cf. Matt 22:33); as for the Sadducees we hear no more of them.

One scribe who has followed the debate knows that Jesus has “answered well” and asks a question motivated by a desire to know: Which is the first of all the commandments? (**12:28**). Jesus has shown himself versed in the will of God and has preached obedience to the commands of God. The human person cannot serve two masters (Matt 6:24, Luke 16:13); all his actions must be focused on a single goal, however many secondary goals there might be. Jesus finds the articulation of this ultimate goal in Moses’ words to Israel shortly after the proclamation of the ten commandments: these commandments can be summed up in the statement: “Listen, Israel, The Lord our God is the one Lord: you shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and from your whole soul [and from your whole mind—added by Jesus] and from your whole strength” (**12:29-30**; cf. Deut 6:4-5). God is the only being worthy of a man’s whole gift of himself since man was made to enjoy God (cf. the previous pericope, 12:25). In an atmosphere of hostility this well-meaning scribe has elicited from Jesus the commandment of commandments, the one that explains all the rest.

Jesus is quick to add a “second” commandment, which had not been asked for, since for man love of God will be most evident in love for those fellow men and women whom God loves. In fact the ten commandments reflect Jesus’ “double” commandment of love: the first three prescribe obligations directly to God, the other seven obligations to other persons. Jesus finds the formulation of this second commandment in a passage of Leviticus which demands that the rights of a neighbor, even an offending one, be honored, even venerated (cf. Lev 19:11-18). The passage ends with the terse summary: “You will love your neighbor as yourself.” Both Old and New Testament thus assume that a man will love himself as one made “in the image of God” (cf. Gen 1:26-27) and “very good” (cf. Gen 1:31). Such a love of self will be the foundation and pattern of love for one’s neighbors. The two passages Jesus has chosen are connected by the verb “love.” Love of God and neighbor constitutes healthy human living, a life that fulfills the nature given man by God. Jesus has reserved this pinnacle of his teaching for his last days and for the Jerusalem temple. The Jewish authorities have now heard what, according to the Galilean rabbi whom they have not been able to get the better of, God is expecting of his people. The scribe recognizes that Jesus has spoken “well and truthfully” (cf. 12:14!) and repeats the two commandments, adding that love of neighbor surpasses all holocausts and sacrifices (cf. 1 Sam 15:22, Hos 6:6). Seeing that he has answered wisely, Jesus asserts that the scribe is not far from the kingdom of God (**12:34a**). The man has given Jesus the opportunity to define the kingdom of God as the community of those who love God and love each other as themselves. This love will be the fruit

of faith in the lordship of Jesus, accompanied as it will be by repentance for sin. Faith enables the grace of Christ to transform us into images of himself who love through his own Spirit.

The replies Jesus has given to his questioners have opened up transcendental dimensions of human living beyond their expectation. No one “dares” to question him further (**12:34b**); they are rendered speechless and will have to resort to subterfuge to eliminate this disturber of the status quo.

Before their plot gets under way, Jesus has a brief time for some final teaching in the temple. Instead of addressing the Pharisees directly as in Matthew, Jesus speaks of the scribes in the third person, asking how they can say that the Messiah is the son of David (**12:35**). In fact it was common knowledge that Israel’s expected Messiah was to be an anointed descendant of David, but Jesus wishes to make a point that has apparently not occurred (?) to the experts in the Jewish scriptures. How can these scriptures put into the mouth of David a reference to his own son (descendant) as his “lord”? This is what happens in the first verse of Psalm 110, attributed to David speaking “in the holy Spirit”: “The Lord said to my lord, “Sit on my right until I place your enemies beneath your feet” (**12:36**). David is clearly addressing his anointed descendant as one greater than himself, his “lord,” elevated to the right hand of God. Once again Jesus is raising the minds of his hearers to a new and unexpected level of truth: the Messiah of Israel is both human and transcends the purely human. The kind of teaching Jesus has been giving in the temple is now applied directly to his own person, which has been the underlying theme of his preaching and activity from the beginning. “Who is this man” demonstrating these powers? (cf. 1:34, 4:41, 8:27-29, 11:9-10). Jesus points his hearers in the direction of his divinity. The messiah is much more than a son of David (**12:37a**).

While the authorities have been discomfited by Jesus, “the great crowd heard him with delight” (**12:37b**). Since entering the city as its king, Jesus has cast out money-lenders from the temple, performed a prophetic gesture symbolizing Israel’s failure to produce good fruit, told a parable about Israel’s loss of its privilege as God’s chosen “vineyard,” used questions posed by the Jewish officials, both malignant and friendly, to teach new dimensions of the kingdom of God, and has raised minds to his more than human status. He has now only to condemn the shallow self-serving religion of the scribes. He teaches the crowds to be wary of the scribes who like walking about in long robes and greetings in the market places (**12:38**) and best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets (**12:39**), all the while devouring the homes of widows and making a show of long prayer. These will receive a very severe judgment (**12:40**). Jesus sketches in three verses the faults of the scribes [and Pharisees] which fill a whole chapter in Matthew (cf. Matt 23, esp. 5-7; for the “long prayers”, see also Matt 6:7). These men have exchanged the compassion of true religion for the show of religious importance. As the Johannine Jesus will say, they seek the glory that comes from men rather than the glory that comes from God (cf. Jn 5:44). For them the reputation of holiness is compatible with the exploitation of

helpless persons, symbolized by the widows, one of the groups for which the Israelite was to have special care (cf. Exod 22:21, Deut 24:17, 27:19, Ps 94:6, Isa 1:17, 23, Jer 7:6, Ezek 22:7, Zech 7:10, Mal 3:5). Like the prophets Jesus has exposed the sins of the authorities. Their “hardness of heart” (cf. 3:5) with respect to the helpless and their preoccupation with self-aggrandizement are of a piece with their rejection of Jesus as God’s envoy. They exalt self in preference to God. The ultimate fate of such persons will soon be graphically portrayed by Jesus in his final discourse.

If Jesus has shown a keen eye for the hypocrisy of the authorities, he also observes ordinary folk who exhibit genuine holiness. He happens to notice in the temple a member of the very group oppressed by the officials who is showing true dedication to God. Sitting opposite the temple treasury, he sees how many people deposit their money there, including many rich people who give great sums (**12:41**). Along comes a single poor widow who throws in two small coins, one penny’s worth (**12:42**). Summoning his disciples to himself, he tells them solemnly that that poor widow has given more than all who have contributed to the treasury (**12:43**), for whereas they gave out of their abundance, she out of her scarcity gave all she had, indeed her whole livelihood (**12:44**). The truly great, the truly favorable to the Lord, are not those who parade their holiness before others, not even those whose generosity costs them little or nothing, but those who hold nothing back from God but truly love him with their whole being (cf. 12:30). Again Jesus draws the minds of his hearers, this time the disciples, to the interior and unseen dimension of holiness, to the God who sees and rewards the heart. The whole thrust of the Jerusalem ministry has been to show that allegiance to God transcends all human considerations and social groups.

As if to underline the contrast between impressive outward appearance and inner lack of substance, Jesus tells a disciple who is admiring the temple stones and buildings that “these great edifices” will be destroyed with not a stone left on a stone (**13:1-2**). He has left the temple for the last time and sits on the Mount of Olives facing the temple, as four disciples ask him when these things will be, and what sign there will be when all these things are about to happen (**13:3-4**). Jesus begins his response, which occupies the rest of the chapter, with the word “See” (*blepete*), an imperative to occur three more times in the discourse (only once in Matthew’s version). Similarly the final word will be “watch”; the task of the disciples will be not to know ahead of time when God will requite those who have rejected his Christ but to be ready to welcome the Lord whenever he does come. They must not let anyone deceive them (**13:5**). Many will come pretending to be the Messiah, and they will deceive many (**13:6**). Wars, rumors of wars, nations and kingdoms rising against each other, earthquakes, famines—these are only the “beginnings of woes,” and the disciples should not yet fear the end (**13:7-8**). They should not be surprised if the consequences of human sin continue to be manifest after the Lord’s death. The forces of evil that are already massed against the Lord will continue to rage against the establishment of his kingdom. The disciples will experience this personally and need to “see [*blepete*]

to themselves.” They will be “handed over” (like Jesus, cf. 10:33) to sanhedrins and beaten in synagogues and summoned before rulers and kings for his sake, as a witness against them (**13:9**; this verse along with vv. 11-13 are placed in Matthew’s Gospel in Jesus’ earlier discourse to the apostles, Matt 10:17-22). They will share the fate of the Master himself even as the gospel is being proclaimed to all the nations, as it must be (**13:10**; cf. 16:15). Matthew places the latter notation after the saying about persevering to the end (cf. Matt 24:14; Matt 24:13 is a doublet of Matt 10:22b).

Mark’s description of the persecution to be suffered by Christians (**13:11-13**) is close to Matthew’s with two minor differences. In Mark the Christians’ defense is inspired by the “holy Spirit” (**13:11**), in Matthew by “the Spirit of your Father” (Matt 10:20). In Mark Christians will be hated “by all men” (**13:13**) but in Matthew “by all the nations” (cf. Matt 24:9b; the doublet of Matt 10:22a reads as Mark). The endurance of Christians will be made possible by the Spirit of God who empowers their faithful witness to Christ.

Evil will seem to have triumphed when the “abomination of desolation” (cf. Dan 12:11) is set up in the temple, that is, when the worship of God seems to have been replaced by worship of evil. Such a perversion can only issue in great tribulations for mankind. Men can flee to the mountains but should not stop to fetch any belongings; those who cannot flee will suffer most (**13:14-19**; cf. Matt 24:15-21). If the Lord were not to shorten those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the sake of the chosen whom he chose, he has shortened those days (**13:20**; Matthew has the saying in the passive voice without mentioning the Lord, cf. Matt 24:22). Again the tribulations are endurable because of God’s providence over his chosen disciples. Jesus knows that the Father will not let men be tried beyond their endurance, even while he does not know the exact time of the end. It is at this point that there will arise the false messiahs which Jesus warned against at the beginning of the discourse (cf. 13:5-6); these will try to lead astray, if possible, even the “chosen” (**13:21-22**; cf. previous verse). As before, the disciples must “see” (*blepete*), that is “understand” and not be surprised. Jesus has told them of all this ahead of time (**13:23**).

After the testing of faith by men’s worship of evil and the emergence of pseudo-messiahs and -prophets, cosmic dissolutions (**13:24-25**) will usher in the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds with great power and glory (**13:26**). This is the only mention of the Son of Man in Mark’s version of the Discourse: Matthew’s version mentions the figure six times. The Son of Man who has been spoken of as the forgiver of sins, Lord of the sabbath, a man destined to be betrayed, to suffer, and to rise from the dead, one who has come to serve, is to revisit his creation in glory, as already suggested when Jesus spoke of men being ashamed at his coming in the glory of his Father (cf. 8:38). The purpose of his coming will be to send his angels to gather his chosen ones (cf. 13:20, 22) from the four winds from the end of the earth to the end of heaven (**13:27**; for OT citations in vv. 24-27 see on Matt 24:29, 30b-31). It is then that those who have persevered in faithfulness to the end will be saved (cf. 13:13, 20), to enter the

kingdom of God (cf. 10:23-26) and “inherit eternal life” (cf. 10:17, 30). The coming of the Son of Man “at the gates” of the world after all the happenings Jesus has foretold is as certain as the coming of summer when the fig tree branch becomes supple and produces leaves (**13:28-29**). As always, Jesus sees organic realities of terrestrial life as the best images for mysteries of the spiritual world. He solemnly underlines the certainty of his predictions by saying that this age will not pass away without their coming true (**13:30**). The word “generation” (*genea*) has an ambivalent meaning: it could refer to the generation of people listening to Jesus, many of whom will be alive when Jerusalem is destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., or to the whole “age” or history of human life on earth. In that case the historical event of the temple destruction would also serve as a symbol of the end of this world as we know it. Indeed “heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (**13:31**). Jesus speaks the words of God, the decrees ordained by God. They are the stability behind the universe that gives substance and meaning to all. Adherence to Jesus’ words guarantees a life that will endure even when the structure of the world as we know it evaporates. The one who adheres to the word by faith endures forever. But it is not given to men or angels, or even to the Son of God, to know the day or the hour when the world as we know it will end and the Son of Man will come (**13:32**). The mystery is known only to the Father. This finally is Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question that launched the discourse.

Verses 24-32 of the discourse have closely paralleled the corresponding portion of Matthew’s version (cf. Matt 24:29-36). The last five verses, which draw the consequences for human behavior of the state of affairs Jesus has described, contain in summary all the material which is developed in Matthew’s version by three great parables about how to live in the period of waiting for the end. The section begins with Jesus’ last use of the imperative “See” (*blepete*), followed by a synonym, “be on the alert,” since men do not know when “the appointed time” (*kairos*, cf. 1:15, 12:2) will be (**13:33**). Now comes a brief but complex parable which is expanded into three distinct parables in Matthew. The situation of waiting for the coming of the Lord is like that in which a man has left his house and entrusted power to his servants, each one with his own task, with the doorkeeper ordered to “keep watch” (**13:34**). The man entrusting servants with specific tasks becomes in Matthew the parable of the man entrusting his servants with talents to be invested (cf. Matt 25:14-30). The doorkeeper ordered to keep watch for the coming of the master “at midnight or at cock-crow or in early morning” (**13:35**) becomes in Matthew the householder keeping watch against the coming of the thief at night (Matt 24:43-44). Finally the warning lest the master coming unexpectedly find the disciples asleep (**13:36**) becomes in Matthew the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt 25:1-13). There is no equivalent in Mark for Matthew’s parable of the steward entrusted with giving food to his fellow-servants (cf. Matt 24:45-51).

Other parts of the discourse found in Matthew but not in Mark are passages about men hating one another and love growing cold (cf. Matt 24:10,

12; 24:11 is duplicated in 24:24), the coming of the Son of Man like lightning and the gathering of the vultures at the body (cf. Matt 24:25-28), and the comparison of the coming of the Son of Man to Noah's flood (cf. Matt 24:37-41). Finally the great Last Judgment scene is found only in Matthew (cf. Matt 25:31-46). In Mark, Jesus ends the speech with the simple imperative that sums up his final parable: "keep watch," a command issued to his hearers and "to all" (**13:37**). Those who in faith keep their eyes on the risen Christ will keep themselves ready to welcome him at his unexpected coming. Living their lives in conformity with the Master's will, they will be ready to accept his gathering them into his kingdom. The lengthy description of future woes is offset by the isolated verses of reassurance, which promise the lasting endurance of Jesus' words (13:31), the preaching of the gospel to all nations (13:10), the presence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' witnesses (13:11), salvation for those who persevere to the end (13:13b), the shortening of the days of tribulation (13:20), the gathering of the chosen by the Son of Man when he comes in glory (13:26-27). The disciples' faith in the risen Jesus must keep them from putting faith in false messiahs (cf. 13:21).

The chief priests and scribes have already wanted to arrest Jesus (cf. 12:12); now they seek to take him by deceit and kill him (**14:1b**), but they are faced with a dilemma. The feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread is to occur in two days (**14a**), and crowds of people are assembling in Jerusalem to celebrate, the very crowds who are receiving Jesus with delight (cf. 11:18, 12:12, 37). The officials fear that to arrest Jesus during the feast would provoke an uproar among the people (**14:2**). Mark relates these simple facts, while Matthew has Jesus tell his disciples that the feast is coming and that he is to be handed over to be crucified, thus presenting Jesus as in control of events and as explicitly connecting his death with the feast.

The officials' dilemma is about to be resolved. An incident demonstrating the lavish love with which Jesus deserves to be honored will be followed by his betrayal by one of his chosen twelve. Mark's version of the anointing of Jesus at Bethany (**14:3-11**) is similar to Matthew's with minor differences. The objection to the woman's "wasteful" action comes not from the disciples (cf. Matt 26:8) but from "certain people" (**14:4**). Mark specifies the value of the ointment as "more than three hundred denarii" (**14:5**) and adds that the critics "scold" the woman. In Jesus' reply Mark has three phrases not found in Matthew: "Leave her alone" (**14:6**); "Whenever you wish, you can do good to them [the poor]" (**14:7**); and "She has done what she could do" (**14:8**). For Jesus the spontaneous, lavish, and loving anointing of his head by the woman is the perfectly appropriate way to honor his sacred body which is to be offered as a ransom for men, to be buried, and to rise from the dead. Though she does not know it, the woman's anointing at the banquet is a burial anointing, since his death is already being plotted. Like the widow noticed by Jesus in the temple (cf. 12:42-44), the woman was not stinting in the expression of her devotion. It is her recognition of the unsurpassable value of Jesus, particularly on the eve of his death, that is to become part of the gospel wherever it is preached (**14:9**). But at the same

moment Jesus' body is so honored, one of the twelve, Judas Iscariot, goes to the chief priests in order to betray him **(14:10)**. Mark does not record Judas' conversation with the priests or the amount paid for the betrayal (cf. Matt 26:15) but mentions that the priests "rejoiced" **(14:11)** that a way has been found to arrest Jesus secretly, even though it be at the time of the feast.

On the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread, when the paschal lamb is sacrificed, Jesus' disciples know that he will want to eat the passover meal but ask where to prepare it, since Jesus has no abode in the city **(14:12)**. Mark recounts the finding of the place with considerably more detail than Matthew, who simply has "the disciples" tell a certain individual that he intends to eat the passover meal at his house (cf. Matt 26:18). Jesus tells two of the disciples to go into the city, where a man carrying a water jar would meet them. They are to follow him **(14:13)**, and when he goes inside they are to tell the head of the house that the teacher asks where is the dining room where he may eat the passover meal with his disciples **(14:14)**. The man will show them a large upper room furnished and ready, and there the two will prepare for the meal for Jesus and his disciples **(14:15)**. The disciples go off and enter the city and find everything as Jesus had told them, and they prepare the meal **(14:16)**. As in his royal procession into the city (cf. 11:1-11), Jesus has divinely ordained the circumstances for a definitive symbolic and religious event. He is to make this passover meal the visible expression and realization of the sacrifice of his body and blood to be made on the cross the following day.

The previous two pericopes are of differing lengths in Matthew and Mark; in the first pair (Matt 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11) Matthew's is longer, and in the second pair (Matt 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16) Mark's is longer, both for reasons characteristic of the respective authors. For Matthew the betrayal by Judas is an opportunity to introduce an Old Testament passage to be fulfilled in the Passion of Jesus; Mark gives the emotion of the chief priests. For Mark the preparation for the passover meal contains the kind of vivid detail that so strongly suggests an eye-witness account. Matthew has none of the detail but adds Jesus' comment, "My appointed time is near" (cf. Matt 26:18); for this evangelist the Lord's sense of the meaning of events is paramount.

When evening comes, Jesus and the Twelve arrive at the house **(14:17)**. As they are eating the meal he solemnly declares that one of them will betray him, one who is eating with him **(14:18)**. Jesus is alluding to the psalmist who laments that a companion who had eaten his bread has turned his heel against him (Ps 41:10). Jesus sees himself as the one in whom the words of the psalmist are carried out literally. He is the one betrayed by friends who has only God to trust in for rescue. We have known since the appointment of the Twelve (cf. 3:19, 14:10-11) that one of them, Judas Iscariot, would betray him. Now Jesus connects that betrayal with the very meal in which he will give himself as food and drink to his disciples. As the Twelve are grieved and one by one ask, "Surely not I?" **(14:19)**, Jesus says simply, "One of the twelve, who dips into the dish with me" **(14:20)**. Mark does not here identify Judas as the betrayer, as Matthew does

(cf. Matt 26:25), but he reports Jesus' judgment of the betrayer. The Son of Man indeed goes his way as is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed; better for him if that man had never been born (**14:21**). Jesus knows that his vocation is to be handed over to death as a ransom for many (cf. 10:33-34, 45). Throughout the Gospel he has asked only that men acknowledge the divine presence in him, that is, respond to him with faith. Faith in him is the way of accepting his salvation. Not to let oneself be won over by faith in him is to exclude his saving gift. It is to reject the life he came to bring and to live in eternal frustration of the desire for that life. Such a tortured existence, such an eternal self-hatred would be a worse state than never to have existed at all. These stark words of Jesus show how seriously he and his Father take human freedom: man can refuse his own happiness. Jesus can do nothing for a person who persists in rejecting him. This is the sin that cannot be forgiven, the refusal to confess what one knows to be true (cf. 3:29), the preference of a paltry created good (in Judas' case a small sum of money) to the uncreated Good (cf. 10:18). One can only hope that anyone who approaches death in this sinful state will be given and will accept the grace to repent and reach out to accept the offered gift.

Jesus has already told us that his death is to be a ransom for many, that is, it will be beneficial to men, saving them from whatever captivity they are in, especially the captivity of sin (cf. 2:10, 17, 3:28, 11:25). He has also twice showed his desire to feed his hungry people in a miraculous way that recalls the manna from heaven in the desert. He has often celebrated meals with his disciples and others (cf. 1:31, 2:15, 7:1-2, 14:3). Finally, this Passover meal has special significance as commemorating the Exodus of Jews from Egypt and the founding of the chosen people. Knowing that Judas has already put in motion the series of events that will lead to his death, he takes the bread that is part of the Passover meal and makes it the sign of the life which will come to men through his sacrificed body. Receiving the bread with thanks from his Father, he incorporates into his thanksgiving the gift of his life into the hands of the Father, knowing that this sacrificed body will give life to those who eat it with faith. His body given in sacrifice will be the new liberation from captivity, the captivity of sin, and will constitute the definitive manna from heaven. All this is realized in the simple words: "Taking bread, blessing, he broke and gave it to them and said, 'Take; this is my body'" (**14:22**).

Since a meal is food and drink, Jesus follows the same pattern as for the bread in giving his disciples himself as drink. Taking the cup, giving thanks, he gives it to them, and they all drink from it (**14:23**; in Matthew the latter clause becomes the charge, "Drink from this all of you," cf. Matt 26:27b). As the bread broken and distributed became the means of conveying his sacrificed body to the disciples, the wine taken from the cup is made the blood which is to be poured out for many on the following day. Jesus wishes to become heavenly food and heavenly drink. He says, "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many" (**14:24**). The blood poured out is the blood of a sacrificial victim (cf. Lev 4:5-7, 16-18, 24-25, 29-30, 33-34); it contains the life of the flesh (cf. Lev 17:11,

Deut 12:23). Men were forbidden to drink blood in the Old Testament (cf. Lev 3:17, 17:10-14, Deut 12:16, 23), but Jesus intends men to drink the very life that is in his blood. The Servant of the Lord, too, was by his suffering to benefit “many,” in this case by justifying them (cf. Isa 53:11). Thus another link is forged with the prophecy of the suffering servant (cf. 1:9, 11, 2:20, 9:12, 35, 10:45). Jesus’ blood is to be offered to God in a special sacrifice that constitutes a covenant like that made between Yahweh and the people through Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai (cf. Exod 24:4-8). After sprinkling the altar and the people with the blood of the sacrificed animals and reading the book of the Covenant, Moses declared, “This is the blood of the Covenant that Yahweh has made with you, containing all these rules” (cf. Exod 24:8). By identifying his own blood as the blood of the covenant, Jesus is creating an indissoluble bond between God and the disciples for whom the blood is poured out. Moses and the priests and elders with him also “ate and drank” a celebratory meal after the Sinai covenant (cf. Exod 24:11), though it was not blood that was drunk. In so few words Jesus has identified his approaching death as a sacrificial act destined to give life to his followers and has made bread and wine the vehicles of his saving, nourishing act. His divine authority recreates the two substances as his very body and blood. As this covenant binds men with God in the Lord’s body and blood, it also fixes men in a state of covenant obedience which will be both a gift and a vocation, an aspect of the covenant that remains latent in Mark but will be elaborated elsewhere in the New Testament.

Jesus underlines that this is his last supper by declaring solemnly that he will not again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when he drinks it new in the kingdom of God (**14:25**). His death will put an end to earthly meals, but on the other side of death he will live as the keystone of the new people of God, a people redeemed by him and believing in him. The new wine that he will drink will be the inebriating presence of his Father which, as Jesus points out in Matthew, will be shared by his disciples (cf. Matt 26:29). In celebrating this last Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus has transformed the feast by making it the symbolic celebration of the sacrifice by which he will create the new people of God.

Concluding the meal with songs, they leave the city for the Mount of Olives (**14:26**; cf. 11:1, 13:3). On the way Jesus announces his imminent desertion by his disciples. His arrest by the authorities will be the occasion of the disciples “taking offense” at him (**14:27a**). He finds in Israel’s scriptures a passage that exactly describes the situation: God had said in the book of Zechariah, “I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered” (**14:27b** = Zech 13:7). Jesus had suggested his role as shepherd before the feeding of the five thousand (cf. 6:34). As “Son of David” (cf. 10:47-48) he would be a true shepherd of Israel (cf. Ezek 34:23-24, Jer 23:3-6, Ps 78:70-72), teaching, feeding, and healing. But the shepherd must be “struck down,” put to death, because he is also the servant of the Lord who is to be “for our faults struck down in death” (cf. Isa 53:8). He would “surrender himself to death, letting himself be taken for a sinner, while he

was bearing the faults of many” (cf. Isa 53:12). The sheep who had gone astray would be saved by one led like a lamb to the slaughterhouse, burdened with the sins of all (cf. Isa 53:6-7). The Father willed that the Son be struck down by the sins of men in order to make atonement for them (cf. Isa 53:10). To the disciples this being given into the hands of men would be a disaster and reason for leaving the master. Yet it would be by this very death that the shepherd would gather in his lost sheep. He gives them a rendezvous where they should meet him after his resurrection: he will go before them into Galilee **(14:28)**, where they had first learned to believe in him.

But the apostles overestimate their loyalty to Jesus. Peter answers that though everyone else take offense at Jesus, he will not do so **(14:29)**. Jesus makes the prediction more specific, solemnly declaring that Peter himself that day, that very night, before the cock crows twice will have denied him three times **(14:30)**. But Peter says all the more confidently, “Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you,” and they all say the same thing **(14:31)**.

The disciples’ abandonment begins even before the arrest. Jesus arrives with them at a place called Gethsemane and instructs them to sit down while he prays **(14:32)**. He wishes to commit himself to the Father’s will and would welcome human support in this profound act of trust. His prayer will in a sense be at two removes from the disciples. He first takes three of them apart with him, the same three who witnessed his transfiguration on the mountain (cf. 9:2), and beginning to feel distress and anxiety **(14:33)** communicates to them his suffering in the words of a psalm, “Sorrowful is my soul” (cf. Ps 42:6, 12, 43:5), adding the phrase “even to death,” and inviting them to remain there and “keep watch” **(14:34)**. This was the very command he had given his disciples at the conclusion of the discourse on the end (cf. 13:34-36). He then moves a little forward from the three where, as if in a sanctuary of his own, he falls to the ground and prays that if it be possible, this hour might pass from him **(14:35)**, and he says, “Take this cup from me; but not what I will but what you will” **(14:36)**. The Son will adhere to his Father’s will at the great cost of thwarting his own desire for human thriving and fellowship. His divine heart will suffer the hatred of the people he loves. When he returns and finds the three disciples asleep, he expresses his pain: “Simon, are you sleeping? Were you not able to keep watch for one hour? **[14:37]**. Watch [plural] and pray, lest you enter into temptation; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak **[14:38]**.” By remaining aware of the presence of God behind the events of experience, one is able to meet those events relying on the help of God; if one forgets that presence, he is pulled away from the divine will by the force of circumstances. Jesus expresses the inner struggle in terms not found often in the Gospels, that is, the conflict between spirit and flesh. It is the spirit that watches and prays; flesh without spirit responds to whatever sensual stimuli are strongest, in this case, the disciples’ instinct to save their own skin. Jesus returns to pray, “saying the same words” **[14:39]**; Matthew here gives a second speech, cf. Matt 26:42]. Going back, he finds them [the three or the twelve] asleep, for their eyes were weighted down. Mark adds that “they did not know

how to answer him" (14:40). The third time Jesus tells them, "Sleep on and rest; it is enough [*apechei*; translation uncertain—this is RSV; NJB: "It is all over"]; the hour has come; see, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners" (14:41). Formerly Jesus had predicted his being handed over to "men" (cf. 9:31), to the "chief priests and scribes" (10:33), to the "pagans" (10:34). Now he ascribes to all these groups the term "sinners" to underline their common hostility to God. Jesus bids the disciples, "Arise; let us go; see, the one who is betraying me is approaching" (14:42). Jesus' alertness goes to meet the Father's will before the disciples realize what is happening.

Mark's version of Jesus' arrest (14:43-52) is substantially the same as Matthew's but does not have Jesus' teaching on living by the sword or on the ability of his Father's angels to protect him had it not been written that "it must happen this way" (Matt 26: 52-54). Jesus underscores the cowardice of the officials by saying they could have arrested him while he was teaching during the last few days in the temple (14:48-49); he knows that they feared the people's reaction to a public arrest (cf. 12:12, 14:1-2). He sees his arrest as the fulfillment of the scriptures, as he had seen the royal entry into Jerusalem (cf. 11:2, 7), his rejection by the "builders" (cf. 12:10), the betrayal by Judas (cf. 14:20-21), the establishment of a covenant sacrifice in his blood (cf. 14:24), the scattering of the disciples (cf. 14:27), his suffering in the Garden (cf. 14:34). He may be thinking here of a phrase from the song of the Servant, "By force and by law he was taken" (cf. Isa 53:8) or of the arrests of prophets like Micaiah (cf. 1 Kgs 22:26-27) and Jeremiah (Jer 37:15-16) or of the psalmist (cf. Ps 71:11). While Mark omits the teaching of Jesus at the arrest, he includes a colorful detail absent from the other Gospels. When the apostles fled, a young man following Jesus, clothed only with a loose tunic, was apprehended, but he was able to escape naked, leaving the garment in the hand of his captor (14:51-52). The incident associates Jesus' arrest with the day of retribution foretold by the prophet Amos, a day when "the bravest warriors will run away naked" (cf. Amos 2:16). The day of Jesus' arrest is the day of God's judgment on sinful Israel.

Mark's account of Jesus' questioning by the chief priests, the elders and the scribes at the house of the high priest (14:53) differs little from Matthew's. Peter waits in the courtyard not "to see the end" (cf. Matt 26:58) but "warming himself by the fire" (14:54). Mark twice points out that the evidence given by false witnesses did not agree (14:56, 59). In the accusation about destroying the temple, Mark contrasts the temple "made with hands" with that "not made with hands" (14:58), a possible allusion to Jesus as the cornerstone (cf. 12:10) of the temple that is the new people of God (cf. 3:34-35, 14:24). In order to make his accusation, the high priest standing up "in the middle questioned" Jesus (14:60). Jesus is not only silent but "made no answer" (14:61a). When he does answer the high priest's second question (14:61b), whether Jesus is "the Christ, the son of the blessed one," Jesus first answers "I am" (14:62) before going on to predict the coming of the Son of Man (cf. 8:38) on the clouds of heaven (cf. 13:26). Instead of quoting the Sanhedrin's unanimous verdict of death, Mark puts the

verdict in indirect speech introduced with a strong verb: “they all condemned him to be worthy of death” (14:64; cf. 10:33). In the mocking of Jesus, Mark stipulates that his face was covered, that he was simply commanded “Prophecy,” and that the servants took part in the slapping (14:65). The small differences between the two accounts tend to show Matthew giving more interpretation of events and Mark giving more sense detail and drama.

While Jesus is being accused, his chief disciple is also questioned in the courtyard of the high priest (14:66). While Jesus spoke the truth, the disciple three times lies. Mark reminds us that he was “warming himself” (14:67) and has Peter add an extra verb in his first denial: “I neither know or understand what you are saying” (14:68a). When the same serving girl “again” accuses him in the “forecourt” (14:68b-69), Peter again denies Jesus but without an oath (14:70a, cf. Matt 26:72). In the third accusation where Mark has “For you also are a Galilean” (14:70b), Matthew explains, “For your speech clearly identifies you” (cf. Matt 26:73). In his last denial Peter swears he does not know “this man you are speaking of” (14:71). In accord with the prediction of 14:30 the cock crows “twice” before Peter realizes his guilt (14:72). Instead of “And going out he wept bitterly,” Mark has a more mysterious clause: “And he began to weep” [translation uncertain; lit., “And throwing himself he wept”; NJB “And he burst into tears”; RSV “And he broke down and wept”]. Peter is brought inescapably face to face with his own cowardice and infidelity. His self-sufficiency and self-assurance crumble and he sheds the tears that signify the repentance that Jesus has called for (cf. 1:15, 6:12). Peter will not be able to claim leadership of the Lord’s Church except as a forgiven sinner. Perhaps nothing confirms the divine origin of Christianity so much as the manifest weakness of its first leaders and representatives.

Mark’s account of the events of the morning is more streamlined than Matthew’s, which is almost twice as long. Absent from Mark is the account of Judas’ return of the money and his death (Matt 27:3-10), the story of Pilate’s wife’s dream (Matt 27:19), and Pilate’s washing of his hands in “innocence” (Matt 27:24-25). At the early morning meeting of the Sanhedrin, Mark says simply “they held a consultation” (15:1), while Matthew specifies the decision to have Jesus put to death. Pilate questions Jesus twice. To the question whether he is King of the Jews, Jesus answers simply as in Matthew (15:2). Then after a flood of accusations by the chief priests, Pilate asks if he has no answer to the things he’s being accused of (15:3-4). To Pilate’s amazement, “Jesus no longer answered anything” (15:5). In Mark the crowd initiate the request for the customary liberation of a prisoner for the feast (15:8), and Mark gives more information than Matthew about Barabbas’s crimes: he was arrested with some revolutionaries who in their revolt had committed murder (15:7). In two questions to the crowd, paralleling his two questions to Jesus, Pilate refers to Jesus as “the king of the Jews” instead of as “Jesus who is called Christ” (15:9; cf. Matt 27:17, 22); the impression is given that it truly is the king of the Jews who is on trial. Pilate feels the crowd will support his desire to free Jesus against the high priests; he has not reckoned with the power of the priests to incite the crowd in

favor of Barabbas **(15:10-11)**. In answer to Pilate's second question about what to do with the one they call King of the Jews **(15:12)**, the crowd shouts, "Crucify him" **(15:13)**, a starker expression than Matthew's "Let him be crucified" (cf. Matt 26:22, 23). A second, stronger "Crucify him!" is shouted in answer to a final question by Pilate, "Why, what evil has he done?" **(15:14)**. Mark gives the briefest motivation for Pilate's decision: "Desirous of satisfying the crowd," he releases Barabbas and having scourged Jesus, hands him over to be crucified **(15:15)**. This is the final reference in the Gospel to the "handing over" of Jesus; the verb has been used fourteen times with Jesus as the object, once with John the Baptist, and three times with the disciples. The deliverance of the Son of God into the hands of sinners for the liberation of sinners is at the heart of the story of Christ.

Mark's account of the mocking by the soldiers is also starker than Matthew's **(15:16)**. First comes the clothing in purple and the placing of the woven crown of thorns on the head **(15:17)**. Next the verbal greeting, "Hail, King of the Jews" **(15:18)**, cf. 15:2, 9, 12). Finally three gestures: beating the head with a reed, spitting, and genuflecting in feigned worship **(15:19)**. Mark summarizes the process as a "mocking," tells of the removal of the purple and Jesus' re-clothing with his own garments **(15:20)**. In Matthew the reed is first placed in Jesus' hand as a scepter, and the "kneeling" and "mocking" are mentioned before the greeting. The beating and spitting come after the greeting in reverse order. Mark's pattern of words followed by actions with a summarizing statement is less complicated than Matthew's interwoven account, but in both cases the focus is on the irony of the king of nations being mocked as king by pagans. The mocking announced ahead of time by Jesus (cf. 10:33-34) has begun; it will be completed as Jesus hangs on the cross. Jesus seems to sum up in himself the verbal and physical abuse suffered by the psalmist (cf. Ps 35:15-16, 42:11, 68:8, 10, 20-21, 119:51).

Mark notes that as Jesus is being led to Golgotha a certain Simon from Cyrene is coming in from the field and is pressed into service to carry the cross of Jesus **(15:21)**. He is identified as the father of Alexander and Rufus, presumably believers known to the community for whom Mark writes. The man would have been remembered in Christian circles as one privileged to "carry the cross" of Jesus (cf. 8:34). Jesus declines the wine mixed with myrrh **(15:23)**. When he has been fixed to the cross, in accordance with Psalm 22 his garments are divided and lots are cast "who should take what" **(15:24)**. Alone among the evangelists Mark notes that it was at the third hour of the day that they crucified Jesus **(15:25)**. The written notice of Jesus' "crime" repeats the theme of Pilate's questioning and the irony of the mockery by the soldiers: "The King of the Jews" **(15:26)**; cf. 15:2, 12, 18).

The mocking of Jesus on the cross is framed by references to the two thieves crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left **(15:27, 32b)**. Not only is Jesus "reckoned with sinners" (cf. Isa 53:12); he is "reviled" even by them. The bystanders implement the words of the psalms by "tossing their heads" in

scorn at Jesus (**15:29**, cf. Pss 22:8, 109:25). They tell him to come down from the cross, since he has supposedly claimed that he could destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (**15:30**, cf. 14:58). The chief priests with the scribes mock him to each other, saying that the one who saved others (cf. 5:34, 6:56, 10:52) cannot save himself (**15:31**). “Let the Christ the King of Israel come down now from the cross so that we might see it and believe” (**15:32a**). From every direction—from Pilate, from the Roman soldiers, from the inscription on the cross, and now from the Jewish leaders—it is the kingship of Jesus that is kept before our eyes. The leaders are still trying to dictate what constitutes divine authority. They will believe only if Jesus conforms to the demands they establish. This is the “testing” of Jesus that he has already condemned (cf. 8:11-12).

The hours approaching Jesus’ death will be characterized by darkness (**15:33**), reminiscent of the day of the Lord’s judgment described by the prophets (cf. Amos 8:9, “I will darken the earth in broad daylight”; Zeph 1:15, Amos 5:18-20, Joel 2:1-2). Human reason is being confounded as God destroys the power of sin by suffering its consequences. The cross is God’s judgment on the world, the confounding of human arrogance by the light of divine love. As the victim nears the end of his mission he makes his own the words of the psalmist experiencing the absence of God. Mark gives them in Aramaic and then in Greek translation (**15:34**, cf. Ps 22:2). The Son of Man ends his life in an abyss of desolation. His calling on “My God,” *elōi*, is misinterpreted as a call on the prophet Elijah (**15:35**) and prompts one of the bystanders to run and fill a sponge with bitter wine and place it on a reed for Jesus to drink, thinking to prolong his life until Elijah comes to take him down (**15:36**). Emitting another, wordless “loud cry” (cf. 15:34), Jesus expires (**15:37**). The life of the Son of Man, the savior of the world, has been snuffed out. He has not turned away from human rejection but has suffered it to the end. At that instant the barrier separating God from men is broken. Mark signifies this by telling how the veil of the temple, separating the Holy of Holies from the area where priests were admitted, was “torn in two from top to bottom (**15:38**; for the verb see also 1:10). Not only is the barrier between God and men broken, but the pagans become integrated into the people of God. The centurion standing opposite Jesus and seeing that he died in this way, confesses, “Truly this man was son of God” (**15:39**). Inferences could be made why the Roman soldier was so convinced, but Mark’s main point is that the moment of the crucifixion is the moment of the salvation of all men, Jews and gentiles alike. Jesus died like a son of the God he served, compliant, loving, obedient. Between the comment of the Jewish bystander about Elijah and the confession of faith of the Roman soldier, we have moved from the Old Testament world to the New. Membership in the people of God will now belong to those who confess Jesus as Lord.

Perhaps the bridge between Old and New is found in the Jewish women who have looked on the scene “from afar” (**15:40**), among whom are Mary of Magdala, and Mary the mother of James the younger and Joset, and Salome [Matthew has “the mother of the sons of Zebedee” in this position], who followed

him in Galilee and ministered to him, and many others who went up with him to Jerusalem **(15:41)**. When the apostles fled, these women remained nearby. Their being with the Lord even at his death and later at his burial and empty tomb justifies their being considered as the nascent Church, who like Mary “pondered these things” in their hearts and provided the fruitful soil of faith.

Jesus has died sooner than was expected **(15:44a)**. Since the end of the day of preparation for the Sabbath is approaching **(15:42)**, it is imperative to have the body buried before sundown. We learn that a “prominent counselor” on the Sanhedrin is sufficiently partial to Jesus to want to provide a tomb. As one who was awaiting the “kingdom of God,” Joseph of Arimathea sees in Jesus the true king (cf. 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32). He “summons up courage” (not in Matthew, cf. Matt 27:58) and approaches Pilate to request the body **(15:43)** and receives it when the centurion has verified that Jesus has died **(15:44b-45)**. The five actions of the burial are described in a single verse: “And having purchased a linen cloth, taking him down he wrapped him in the cloth and placed him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock and rolled a stone before the entrance of the tomb” **(15:46)**. The noble and quasi-official status of Joseph, the care with which he sees to the body, and Pilate’s permission guarantee that the body will have a dignified and recognized place of rest until the moment of resurrection. In addition two of the women present at the crucifixion see where the body is laid **(15:47)**. Romans, a sympathetic Jerusalem Jew, and devout Galilean women disciples all witness the place of burial. The body of Jesus rests in the tomb on the sabbath, the day of rest.

As soon as the sabbath is over, the three women mentioned at the crucifixion scene (cf. 15:40) purchase aromatic oils with which to come and anoint the body of Jesus **(16:1)**. Very early on the first day after the sabbath they come to the tomb as the sun is rising **(16:2)**. They will soon discover that the true light of the world has risen on this day. They are absorbed in discussing who will roll away the stone from the entrance of the tomb for them **(16:3)**, when looking up, they see it has already been rolled back, large as it was **(16:4)**. Entering the tomb they see a young man seated on the right clothed in a white robe, and they are alarmed **(16:5)**. The devout women will be the first to hear the gospel news. The man tells them not to be alarmed; they seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified; he has risen, he is not there. The man invites them to see the empty space where they had placed him **(16:6)**. He charges them to go and tell Jesus’ disciples and Peter that Jesus is going ahead of them into Galilee; there they will see him, as he had said to them after the Last Supper on the way to the Mount of Olives (cf. 14:28). Unprepared for this development, the women leave and flee from the tomb, seized with trembling and amazement, “for they were afraid” **(16:8)**. The original Gospel seems to have ended at this point. The women are aware that the world as they have known it is changed. Death is no longer the last word about human life. The realization is too big for them; they cannot even speak of it. Such is the first awed response of men to the good news of the resurrection of Jesus. One is in the presence of a recreating act of God which

shatters our old ways of thinking even as it opens up unexpected horizons. The Christian who has heard the message of the young man in the tomb is shaken to the core of his being only to become open to the gift of eternal life. One can infer that the reaction of the women will be repeated in the apostles and in all those who will one day constitute the Church.

The original ending of the Gospel was very early felt to be unsatisfactory or at least incomplete, and other endings were soon appended to it. It seemed important that the appearance of Jesus to the disciples announced in 16:7 should be recounted as the conclusion of the Gospel. Most modern Bibles print the ending found in many (but not the most important) early manuscripts. According to this “longer ending” Jesus appeared early on the first day after the sabbath first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons **(16:9)**. Here there is no mention of the other women. Mary goes and gives the news to those who had been with Jesus as they grieve and weep **(16:10)**. Hearing that he is alive and was seen by her, they do not believe **(16:11)**. A second appearance in different form is to two of Jesus’ followers on the road as they go out into the field **(16:12)**. These also report to the rest, who once again do not believe **(16:13)**. Finally he appears to the eleven as they are at table (it is not said that they are in Galilee), and this time the writer describes the appearance. Jesus upbraids the disciples’ lack of faith and the hardness of heart shown in their failure to believe those who had seen him risen **(16:14)**. The writer is anxious to establish the necessity for those who have not seen the risen Lord to believe the testimony of those who have seen him. It is the acceptance of the witness of the apostles that will constitute membership in the Church down the ages (cf. John 20:29).

After charging the apostles to go to the whole world and proclaim (cf. 1:4, 14, 38-39, 3:15, 6:12, 13:10, 14:9) the gospel to every creature **(16:15)**, Jesus underlines the importance of faith in their message. In what sounds like a later formulation of the early Church, he specifically connects faith and baptism as the combined requirement for salvation: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned” **(15:16)**. Elsewhere salvation is attributed either to faith (e.g., Luke 8:12, John 1:12, 3:16, 36, 11:25-26, 20:31, Acts 11:21, 26:18, Rom 1:16-17, 3:28, 4:24, 10:9-13, Eph 2:8) or to baptism (e.g., Matt 28:19, John 3:5, Acts 2:38, Rom 6:3-4) even though one member of the duo usually implies the other (cf. Acts 10:43 and 47, 16:33-34). The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (cf. Acts 8, 36, 38) and of Saul (cf. Acts 9:18) takes place after they have clearly accepted the word about the risen Jesus even though the word “believe” or “belief” is not used. In Colossians, Paul attributes the dying and rising of the Christian first to baptism (cf. Col 2:12a) and then to the Christians’ faith (cf. Col 2:12b). The presentation of the two as equal requirements for salvation represents a reflection on the experience of the early Church (cf. also Acts 8:12-13, 18:8, 19:4-5, Gal 3:26-27). It represents the mind of Jesus even if this verse in Mark is the only place where Jesus mentions faith and baptism together.

The author of the long conclusion is especially interested in the supernatural signs that will attend believers. The five signs mentioned are of three types: works of exorcism and healing modeled on those of Jesus; speaking in “new languages” for the purpose of evangelization; and protection against snakes (cf. Ps 91:13, Acts 28:3-6) and poison (**16:17-18**). After these somewhat impersonal predictions, uncharacteristic of the Marcan Jesus, the Lord is taken up into heaven (like Elijah, cf. 2 Kgs 2:11) and takes his seat at the right hand of God (**16:19**; cf. Ps 110:1, Mark 12:36, 14:62). As for the apostles, they followed the Lord’s command by going out and “preaching” (cf. 16:15) everywhere. The risen Lord who had promised in Matthew’s Gospel to be “with” the apostles till the end of the age demonstrates his accompaniment of the apostles by working with them and confirming their preaching by authenticating wonders (**16:20**). Faith provides the bridge for the risen Lord to act in the world.