

Insights In Liturgy

By MSGR. WILLIAM H. SHANNON

The Year Of Mark

Part 2

Even though Matthew's Gospel comes before Mark's in the Bible, it is quite universally agreed that Mark's was the first Gospel to be written. In the words of Lawrence Hausman, Mark was:

"The saint who first found grace to pen The life which was the Life of men."

The framework of Mark's Gospel is the *kerygma* or preaching of the early Church. This *kerygma* centered about (1) the preaching of Jesus in Galilee that followed upon the imprisonment of John the Baptist, (2) the journey to Jerusalem, and (3) the climactic events of Jesus' life that took place in Jerusalem: His passion, death and resurrection. Mark invented the "gospel" as a literary genre, using the *kerygma* as his outline and filling in that outline with events from the life and ministry of Jesus.

Mark wrote in Greek and, though his Greek is

often clumsy, he was a good storyteller. His stories sparkle with vivid, picturesque details which, if unimportant in themselves, suggest the presence of an eyewitness. Since Mark himself was not an eyewitness of the events he narrates, scholars suggest that he heard many of the stories he tells from listening to the preaching of St. Peter.

In his Gospel Mark gives us little of the sayings of Jesus (the lengthy discourses of Matthew and the long parables of Luke have no counterpart in Mark's Gospel). Instead, his emphasis is on the mighty deeds that Jesus performed — His great acts of power (*dynamis* is the Greek word used by Mark) which for Mark are strong signs that through Jesus God has begun to establish His Kingdom (His reign) on earth.

There are two, almost equal, parts to the Gospel of Mark. The first part, after an introductory section, speaks of Jesus' activities in Galilee. There is a sense of urgency and movement in the Galilean ministry. Jesus is ever on the move, constantly

under the pressure of the crowds that come to see and hear Him. The climax of this first part comes about midway in the Gospel, in chapter eight, where Peter professes his faith in Jesus: "You are the Messiah."

The second part of Mark's Gospel, after narrating the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, is taken up with the events that led to His passion, death and resurrection. This part also has its climax: the profession of the centurion at the foot of the cross, "Clearly this man was the Son of God." (15:39) It is to be doubted that the centurion realized the full import of his words, but there can be no doubt that these words are the faith-profession of Mark and of the early Church.

Yet, though Jesus is, for Mark, unmistakably the Son of God, no one of the other evangelists portrays his humanity so fully and starkly as Mark. Mark gives us unforgettable pictures of the human Jesus and has preserved for us the human gestures, attitudes and expressions of Jesus, e.g. 3:5, "He looked upon them with anger and sorrow at their stupidity"; 6:6, "He was taken-aback by their want of faith"; 7:4, "Looking up

to heaven, he sighed"; 10:14, "He was indignant when they hindered the children from coming to Him"; 10:16, "He put His arms around the little children"; 11:12, "He felt hungry"; 14:33, "He began to feel dread and to be exceedingly troubled." Indeed, Mark exhausts his limited vocabulary to show Jesus' authority and forcefulness, his wholehearted devotion to the reign of God, his power to attract and repel, his quick sympathy and at times his devastating severity. C.H. Dodd has well written:

"Gentle Jesus meek and mild," says the old hymn, **no doubt with some truth; but these are not precisely the adjectives that leap to the mind in reading Mark. (About the Gospels, p. 3)**

Mark's Jesus is a strange, enigmatic figure — a man who acts as the Son of God. There is a secret about Him that people can but catch glimpses of and which is finally revealed only in the aftermath of the empty tomb.

Mark has left the Church a precious gift in this vivid, moving story of what he calls in his first verse: "the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Word for Sunday

By Father Albert Shamon

The Lord Is Always Calling Us

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 1:14-20. (R1) Jon. 3:1-5, 10. (R2) 1 Cor. 7:29-31.

In last Sunday's liturgy the key word was call. "In times past, God spoke in fragmentary and varied ways to our fathers through the prophets; in this, the final age, He has spoken through His Son." (Hebr. 1:122) This Sunday's liturgy focuses on our response to this call. The Lord is always calling us; He never gives up on us. Some respond to His call and some do not. Sometimes the most unlikely, like the Ninivites, say "Yes," whereas the ones we thought would say



Fr. Shamon to us through His Son." (Hebr. 1:122) This Sunday's liturgy focuses on our response to this call. The Lord is always calling us; He never gives up on us. Some respond to His call and some do not. Sometimes the most unlikely, like the Ninivites, say "Yes," whereas the ones we thought would say

"Yes," like the Judeans, answer "No."

The Jonah parable is a beautiful story. God inspired it to teach that He wills the salvation of all men—even if as hated and hateful as the cruel Assyrians. Historically, God never sent a prophet to a pagan nation. But as our Lord tried to shock Israel out of their formalism by making a Samaritan, so hated by the Jews, the hero of His parable of the Good Samaritan, so at the time of the Restoration of the Jews from their Babylonian Captivity, God tried to snap Israel out of her smug exclusivism—out of thinking that salvation was hers alone—by offering salvation to the Ninivites.

The part of the parable selected for Sunday's reading was chosen to exemplify how one should respond to God's call. If the people of Nineveh

would believe God when He spoke to them through Jonah, how much more ought God's own people believe when He speaks to them through His Son!

And yet when He did, how tragic was the response! When He spoke to His people, through a Jonah, but through a prophet far greater than Jonah, John the Baptizer, they arrested him.

Still God did not give up on His people. He sent His Son to pick up where John had left off. But again, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." No wonder Jesus said: "At the judgment, the citizens of Nineveh will rise with the present generation and be the ones to condemn it. At the preaching of Jonah they reformed their lives; but you have a greater than Jonah here." (Mt. 12:41)

Still God did not give up. He called to Himself fishermen and set about to make them fishers of men. These responded immediately. Yet so few from so many! Still God did not

give up. On these fishers of men, Jesus built His Church. And this Church transmits the call of God to us to change our lives and to accept a love that exceeds the highest desires of the human heart. God is still calling to each of us through His Church, through Her words, Her teachings and Her sacraments.

St. Paul urges us not to tarry, but to respond now, for "the time is short" and "the world as we know it is passing away."

With just a little looking, we could probably find some areas of our Christian life that need improvement or change. But are we like Jonah—reluctant? Do we run away from facing reality? Do we try to get out of what we must do?

Sunday's liturgy shows us that we ought to respond to God's call: decisively, like the Ninivites, and immediately, like Simon, Andrew, James and John.

"The time is short!"

High Court Erases Pa. Abortion Law

Washington, D.C. (RNS) — The U.S. Supreme Court has struck down a Pennsylvania law requiring doctors to use the abortion method most likely to save the life of a fetus after it has reached the "viable" stage.

Justice Harry A. Blackmun, who wrote the 6-3 decision, said the Pennsylvania law is unconstitutionally vague in defining what exact stage is involved in "viability" and subjects doctors performing abortions in the later stages of pregnancy to possible criminal charges.

The Pennsylvania Abortion Control Act was written after the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 landmark ruling on

abortion, which legalized abortions and forbade state interference in the first trimester of pregnancy.

States, however, were empowered to control abortions in an effort to protect fetal life once the fetus becomes viable — "potentially able to live outside of the mother's womb, albeit with artificial aid." The Supreme Court said viability "is usually placed at about seven months but may occur earlier, even at 24 weeks."

The 1974 Pennsylvania law was designed to protect viable fetal life in compliance with Supreme Court guidelines. It required doctors to try to save the life of a fetus when his

"experience, judgment or professional competence tell him that it is viable," or when he has "sufficient reason to believe that the fetus may be viable."

If the doctor determines that the fetus is viable, the law held, he must exercise the same care for the fetus as he would if the mother had wanted to carry it to full term.

Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco and Bishop Thomas C. Kelly, OP, will be the official representatives of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic

He must use the abortion method most likely to save the life of the fetus, so long as it doesn't endanger the mother's life or health.

Doctors violating the provision of the Pennsylvania law were "subject to such civil or criminal liability" that would obtain had the situation involved a normal pregnancy.

To CELAM

Conference to the Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) meeting in Mexico. They have been officially invited by CELAM president Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider of Brazil.

Dick Gregory To Speak At Nazareth

An address by social critic and comedian Dick Gregory on "Social Problems: Social or Anti" will conclude a three-day celebration of black awareness at Nazareth College Jan. 17-19. The lecture, a tribute to the birthday of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, will be held Friday, Jan. 19 at 8 p.m. in the Main Auditorium in the Arts Center, according to a Nazareth release.

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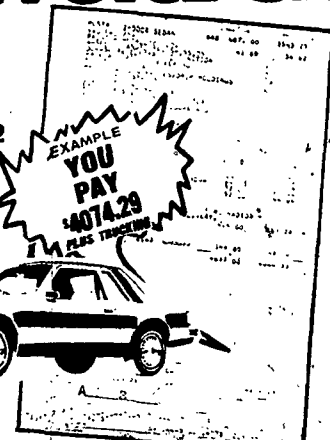
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