Homily – 10th Sunday in Ord. Time (B)

*Gen. 3: 9-15; 2 Cor. 4: 13-5: 1 & Mk. 3: 20-35*

There is a particular look my mother sometimes gives me. It is a look of bewilderment, a look sometimes of total incomprehension. Good and faithful Catholic as she is, she has never really understood why her first-born son, her “golden boy” the doctor, chose to throw away his career and enter a monastery. She is very fond of Ampleforth and the community – indeed I did her second wedding there – but nonetheless, there are times when I think she wishes I was just normal, times when I think she wishes I had never taken this path. And that’s when I get the look. I have often wondered – especially when hearing today’s gospel – whether Jesus ever saw that same look on Mary’s face, that same look of bewilderment, of confusion, of incomprehension at the path his life was taking.

So much in our readings today seems to be about alienation and incomprehension. And it goes right back to the beginning, to that part of the “Fall narrative” in Genesis which we heard in our first reading. As soon as Adam has eaten of the tree, the problems start. Adam is alienated from God – he does not “fear” him in the sense of reverence and awe, but is now afraid of him. Adam is alienated from his own body – knowing his nakedness, he hides in shame at what he is. Adam is alienated from Eve – he blames her for the fault. And both start to be alienated from creation – Eve blames the serpent, and God’s curse puts enmity between the serpent and mankind – each will now spend eternity trying to kill the other. It’s all a bit of a mess.

And something similar seems to be happening in the gospel. Jesus’ family sees him at work, sees the crowds clamouring for his teaching and his healing, and rather than giving thanks to God for such miracles, they think he is out of his mind. Perhaps, like my Mum, they just want him to be “normal”. Even so close to the beginning of his public ministry (for we are near the beginning of Mark’s gospel here), it is clear that the religious authorities would like him to be more “normal” too. The scribes from Jerusalem attribute his power to Beelzebul – the prince of demons – effectively saying he is satanically possessed, and so Jesus has to put them right, pointing out that if Satan is fighting Satan, then he is lost and his power ended. He draws the parable further. Jesus himself is the one who has bound the strong man Satan, and having bound him and overpowered him, he is free to “burgle” his property, that is, those held captive in Satan’s thrall, all those ensnared in sin. Yet despite this quiet, under-stated proclamation of his messianic agenda, they still cannot see what is in front of their eyes. They don’t want to see the power of God breaking into the world – they just want Jesus to be “normal” and all the fuss to settle down.

But, of course, Jesus isn’t “normal”. And I think that’s why the last scene in today’s gospel is so important. At first sight, it can sound like a continuation of the alienation theme. It seems as though Jesus is aware that his family does not understand him, cannot grasp what’s going on, and so he turns his back on them, spurns them in favour of those who *do* understand. That question – *Who are my mother and my brothers?* – can sound harsh, like the very essence of rejection. Is Jesus really disowning his own family? In fact, I think he is doing the very opposite. Rather than rejecting his own family, Jesus is building a new one. Since that very first act of disobedience in Eden, the human family has been fragmented, alienated from God and from each other. But Jesus now says: *Anyone who does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother*. All who do the will of God, all who turn from Adam’s disobedience to the path of obedience shown by Jesus, become part of this new family, become part of this new unity in which all are as precious to him as his own mother.

Jesus’ work is always to build new unity, is always to heal division and fragmentation. And that unity is built above all through our sharing in his Body and Blood, that great saving gift which makes us all sharers in his life and, one day, in his glory. Jesus’ body is broken – on the Cross and in the Mass – for only one reason: that all may have an equal share in the new life he brings, in this new family. Or, as St John puts it in his gospel: *“to gather together in unity the scattered children of God.”* (Jn. 11:52)

At the Easter Vigil each year, as the vigil candles are all lit from the great Paschal Candle, we hear that marvellous phrase in the Exsultet: *a fire into many flames divided, yet never dimmed by the sharing of its light*. That perhaps can be our model – to be the many flames of Christ’s new family in our world, but all shining with the radiance of a single light, the light of Christ, that light that darkness can never overpower. Amen.

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9.6.18

Bidding Prayers – 10th Sun in Ord. Time

Intro: Fr Oswald

R: Let us pray for the Church:

We pray for Francis our Pope, for Bernard our Bishop and for all who hold a ministry of service in the Church.

May they continue to proclaim with joy and faith Christ’s work of reconciliation, so that all may be drawn into the new family of the Church.

Lord, in your mercy...

Let us pray for Vocations:

We pray for young men and women who are discerning their call from the Lord to priesthood and religious life.

May they be guided by the Holy Spirit, and respond with eagerness and faith to the voice of the Lord of the Harvest.

Lord, in your mercy...

Let us pray for those in special need:

We pray for the unemployed and those whose employment is threatened;

We pray for the homeless, especially those in our own city;

We pray for the sick and those who care for them;

We pray for the dying, especially for those who will die alone;

May the Lord, who is life in its fullness be close to them, and inspire us to give what help we can.

Lord, in your mercy...

Let us continue to pray for our Community here – for the Master and Betty, for all who teach and serve here, for all those who join us in prayer.

We pray especially for those still finishing their finals, and for those preparing for Prelims.

Lord, in your mercy...

Let us pray for our own intentions: *(longer pause)*

Lord, in your mercy...

Let us ask Mary, Mother of the Church and Help of Christians, to pray with us and for us as we say:

*Hail Mary...*

*Prayer:*  Fr Oswald