

VESPERS HOMILY
11 SEPTEMBER 2016

MARK 9: 30 – 37

PSALM: 1

This is the second prediction of Jesus fate, that He would "be betrayed into human hands and they would kill Him, and three days after He was killed He would rise again."

The first prediction is found in the previous chapter of Mark's gospel, chapter 8. What, if any, are the differences between the two pronouncements; why say it twice?

In chapter 8, for the first time Jesus asks His Disciples "Who do men say that I am?" Their answers are predictable. Some think you're Elijah, some think you're John the Baptist, some think you're one of the old prophets. Then the question, "Who do you think I am." Peter, being the self-appointed spokesman for the twelve, replies, "You're the Christ, the Messiah."

Jesus' unrecorded reply to that was probably, "and what does that mean; what does it mean to be the Messiah?" It's a rhetorical question; neither Peter nor anyone else, least of all the twelve, had any idea what "Messiah-ship" would entail. They had some vague notion that it was general approval and adulation, a position of power and prestige, as the historical grandeur of Israel would be restored. They argued about who will be most important when that day comes.

Shortly thereafter, at the beginning of chapter 9, Marks tells us that Jesus takes Peter and James and John, His three original disciples, to a mountaintop for a bit of privacy. It's there that they see what it truly means to be the Christ. All the religious traditions of Israel are there on

that mountain; Elijah speaks for the prophets, Moses speaks for the presence of God in the life of the Jews and then God Himself speaks. God declares Jesus to be “His beloved Son.” That is what it means to be “The Messiah.”

The weight of responsibility that has fallen upon Jesus is beyond the comprehension of three dazed fishermen; they finally have a glimpse of the future of their teacher and they are frightened. Even in their simplicity they must have seen how the presence of Jesus would be received by many in Israel.

This second prediction of Jesus’ fate in this reading is made in the light of that realization. The disciples, at least three of them, have finally seen who Jesus is; everything had changed.

In the Greek the prediction of Jesus, future is prefaced with the words “It is necessary.’ It is necessary that the events of Jesus’ passion would take place. What is the necessity?

The necessity arises from the hostility of many to Jesus’ presence, whether He is the messiah or not. We may call it cynical disbelief, the product of centuries of disappointment. No doubt over the years there had been a number of possible messiahs; I am sure such prophets as Elijah and Jeremiah had, by some at least, been thought to just possibly be the one sent by God to lead the Jews. Throughout the Old Testaments there are warnings about false prophets who posed as messiahs; all ultimately failed the people. Is Jesus any different?

Second, the necessity arises from the spiritual nature of Jesus’ work; He does not oppose force with force as a real Davidic messiah would do. Throughout the history of the Jews there had been attempts to throw off the yoke of powers such as Assyria and Babylon and, as in the time of Jesus, Rome, all of which failed. The Jews were no match in

terms of physical power. Their salvation, again and again, had been to place their trust in God, something they frequently forgot. They are in need of a reminder.

Third, the real necessity arises from the purpose of God; the death and Resurrection of Jesus are central to God's plan of redemption for His Creation. Jesus will die through human action; He will be raised by divine action, negating human power over life, negating the power of death itself, clearly demonstrating God's presence, concern, and omnipotence.

That is the point. Jesus has told His Disciples, twice, that the word Messiah is not an honorific title. The Messiah is one making a sacrifice for the people of Israel. If Jesus is indeed the Messiah, and the Disciples have come to realize that, then they too, if they will follow Him, will make their own sacrifices.

The cynical people would not believe that.

We live in a cynical age; everything is questioned. The phrase "nothing is sacred" has real meaning in our time. Perhaps the one grace is that, generally speaking, have not yet become cynical. Children are open to uncritical belief.

However, Fr. Jim Griffiss at Nashotah House told the story of his first position on the staff of a church in New York City. He was fresh out of seminary, full of wisdom and holiness, teaching a children's Sunday School class. He said, without fear of contradiction, "Jesus died for our sins." A little girl said "Yeah. Who asked him to?"

Usually, in my experience teaching Sunday School there was, and hopefully still is, a child-like, simple, unquestioning understanding of the presence of Jesus, untouched by doubt and cynicism. It's as simple

as the figure on the flannel board or on the mimeographed paper to be colored.

It is faith, the sort of faith that Jesus calls the disciples to, and calls you and me to. It is the faith that Jesus sets as an example to God's creation, faith in the presence and words of Jesus, the Messiah, that is in fact faith in God.