

THE EMMAUS SERIES

10th Sunday Year B

Genesis 3: 9-13

2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1

Mark 3: 20-35

Who are my mother and my brothers?

Situating today's gospel reading in Mark's ongoing narrative can help us understand how Mark puts incidents together to convey the drama of the public life of Jesus. Its beginning in Galilee leaves us in no doubt that Jesus caused quite a stir: he taught with authority; crowds gathered where he was staying; he healed the sick and pronounced the forgiveness of sins; and he began to meet opposition. We are reminded of Mark's sub-text: Who is this man? In today's reading, that question confronts Jesus in two very different forms.

The reaction of the family of Jesus gives us a moving glimpse of his situation after leaving home and becoming a vagabond preacher. Following a very traditional way of life, his family were understandably concerned at what they heard, fearing that Jesus may have become unbalanced. But the mission Jesus is initiating aims to open up a world far beyond human loyalties and expectations. As the months that are follow will show, his teaching, his miracles, and the final witness of his death, are all undertaken to inaugurate nothing less than the new family of God, which he called 'the Kingdom'. This incident also helps us to know Mary, the courageous woman who is our model as she makes the journey of life in the darkness of faith. Several times the Gospels remember Mary 'pondering', 'wondering at what has been said', trusting in 'whatever he says to do'. Jesus' departure from the family home would not have been without pain and anxiety for her. Here we see her seeking to understand her son's mysterious mission along with the troubled family. Though it is not something that Mark adverts to as he recalls this moment, Mary is surely the greatest of all those who 'do the will of God'.

The scribes brought a very different challenge. Their vicious attack seems to be an expression of frustration, such as would be expected later in Jesus' ministry – perhaps it is introduced here to underline the sub-text, that we should take with us as we set out to follow Mark's gospel story, Who is this man? Jesus found it easy to point out the inconsistency of his frustrated adversaries' accusation that he is an agent of 'the Prince of demons'. However, what are we to make of the declaration that 'a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven'? Christian faith tells us that there is no possible sin that is beyond the forgiveness of God. The meaning of Jesus teaching is simple enough: Those who, like these scribes, choose to be blind to the working of the Holy Spirit can never find forgiveness so long as they choose not to be open to God's truth.

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