

MARK – the Ideal Gospel for the Precatechumenate

The first writings of the New Testament were the letters of St. Paul. The author of Mark's gospel ventured into new territory when he wrote his proclamation of the good news. Nothing in this genre had been written before. The gospel features a geographical-theological setting beginning in Galilee and ending in Jerusalem.

"Here begins the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). At the midpoint Peter proclaims: "You are the Messiah" (8:29). Finally as Jesus dies on the cross the Roman centurion cries out: "Clearly this man was the Son of God" (15:39). The emerging Church did not celebrate a dead human hero but rather the risen Lord who was seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

As in Mark, Jesus' ministry in all the other synoptic gospels begins with the witness of John the Baptist. This is followed by the temptation in the desert.

His ministry begins with the call of Peter, Andrew, James and John. These four make up an inner circle and first in the four lists of the apostles found in the New Testament (3:17-19; Mt.10:2-4; Lk.6:12-16; Acts 1:13). Here the author emphasizes Jesus' authority from the very beginning. Peter and Andrew leave their fishing nets on the spot and John and James not only left their nets but also their father as well (1:16-22). The writer clearly conveys a sense of urgency. There is no time to waste.

The chapter ends with the cure of the leper. Under Mosaic Law they were unclean (Lev.13:45) and were cut off from the community. The leper requests "to be made clean" (RSV 1:40-45). Jesus shows authority by touching him which was a direct violation of the law and said, "Be clean."

There are five of what are sometimes called "conflict stories." (2:1 to 3:6). The early teachers would have used these stories in defense of their practice of forgiving sins, eating with those on the margins of society, fasting, and observing the Sabbath. It also shows Jesus' opponents moving from being awed to actively planning how they could put him to death.

Jesus is presented as a teacher using parables to instruct (4:1-34). This is followed by four miracles.

The "loaves section" (6:14 to 8:26), have the same sequence of events. Jesus feeds the multitude, crosses the lake, has a controversy with the Pharisees, and ends with a miracle. The first he feeds 5000 with twelve baskets of bread left. The second he feeds 4000 with seven baskets left over. They are so similar that it has been concluded that they are the same incident told to two different audiences. The first for Jewish believers – twelve loaves left; the second for gentile believers – seven loaves left.

The turning point is Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29). There are three significant points made thus far:

1. The disciples seem unable to grasp what Jesus is teaching them (4:13; 6:52; 7:18; 8:17; 9:32).
2. The Pharisees supported by the scribes and priests are plotting against Jesus (2:7; 3:6; 8:11; 10:2).
3. Jesus receives remarkable support from the crowds (1:27-28; 2:2; 3:7; 4:1; 5:21; 6:34; 7:37; 8:1).

Jesus teaches his disciples about his passion three times (9:31-30; 10:32-34). After the first time he presents the doctrine of the cross and what true discipleship means. The path to God's kingdom is carrying one's cross. To follow Jesus means to share in his suffering. This was clearly illustrated by the blind Bartimaeus who after his sight was restored "followed Jesus up the road to Jerusalem" where Jesus died on the cross (10:46-52).

The little apocalypse (ch.13) was a separate unit from another tradition that Mark edited and added to the gospel. It may contain some words of Jesus but he was not an apocalyptic prophet.

After celebrating the first Eucharist Jesus suffers the agony in the garden. Three times he found his disciples asleep during this time of prayer.

The passion is spread over seven days which has led some to call Mark a passion narrative with an extended introduction.

When reading Mark use the New American Bible (NAB). Read the footnotes.

Edited from the Blog of Deacon Paul Carlson
<http://www.aboutcatholics.com/beliefs/mark-the-first-catechism/>

Another resource to consider:

<https://catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/2012/01/studying-the-gospel-of-mark/>