

Fr. Jim Willig Gospel Study - *Time Management*

Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

On leaving the synagogue
Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John.
Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever.
They immediately told him about her.
He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up.
Then the fever left her and she waited on them.

When it was evening, after sunset,
they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons.
The whole town was gathered at the door.
He cured many who were sick with various diseases,
and he drove out many demons,
not permitting them to speak because they knew him.

Rising very early before dawn, he left
and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed.
Simon and those who were with him pursued him
and on finding him said, "Everyone is looking for you."
He told them, "Let us go on to the nearby villages
that I may preach there also.
For this purpose have I come."
So he went into their synagogues,
preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

Gospel Study: *Time Management*

So the first scene, in terms of this Gospel of Mark, Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew and took with him James and John. Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever and immediately they told him about her. There are three interesting things I draw from that first sentence.

First is the fact, Peter was married. The second interesting thing I can note, is that Peter was concerned about his mother-in-law. Don't take anything for granted! Probably more to the point was that he believed Jesus could heal her. Simon hardly knew Jesus at this point but he saw what happened in the synagogue—obviously it made a real impression—and he asked Jesus specifically, 'Can you then heal my mother-in-law?' He must've truly believed that Jesus had these miraculous powers that could be shared. Finally, there is the hint that Jesus began to use this home of Peter as a center for his public ministry. It became for him a home during the times when he wasn't traveling around Galilee spreading and preaching the good news.

We're told then, at the invitation of Simon Peter, that Jesus immediately approached his mother-in-law. That's how I imagine Jesus very lovingly responding to this need. He comes up to her and

Fr. Jim Willig Gospel Study - *Time Management*

the first thing he does is he takes her by the hand. It's interesting to me, you'll notice in all the healing episodes of the Gospel, almost always Jesus touches the person. Interesting isn't it? He could just say words and they would be healed but there is such a connection between healing touch and his healing power. It's that touch of love, it's that part of the way that Jesus truly touched them physically and spiritually that gave him such a healing effect. We ought to be conscious of the healing effect of our touch and I do believe it's that healing touch that any of us can have. We come with faith and prayer and have tremendous love for that person. That power of God can work through us; the healing touch.

Jesus reached out and touched her. Now as I learned this week in studying this line, the Greek verb that Mark uses for "helped her up" is perhaps better translated "raised her up" with the obvious connotation that this is the same word that Mark uses later in the Gospel to describe Jesus being "raised up" after his crucifixion. Mark is already hinting here that Simon Peter's mother-in-law, and all of us, are being raised up continually in the power of Jesus' resurrection. The power of his resurrection offers to all of us the hope that whatever is our sickness, whatever gets us down, that there is hope that we too can be lifted up from that, and raised up in that, and that's our faith. That's our hope, that no matter what gets us down, that the Lord can lift us up and bring about a greater good. Do you believe that? That's certainly what this Gospel would ask us to learn.

We're told then, that immediately the fever left her and she got up and waited on them. Some would say that the greater healing would have been, if the men got up and waited on the women. I thought that would be the greater miracle! I thought I'd say that before all of you said that, okay? Mark is highlighting here once again, the Greek word he uses (not that I know these Greek words, but I read the scholars who do and study this) the same word he uses for "wait on," is the exact same word that Jesus uses when he says, "I have come not to be served, but to serve." You see, that's the miracle. So that right here, Simon Peter's mother-in-law, is the model disciple. It's almost as if you can imagine this play taking place on this stage of the Gospel, and the bright light is cast on this opening scene and of all people, this minor character, Simon Peter's mother-in-law becomes a model. Like a good writer of a play, there's a hint of what the rest the Gospel is all about and the themes that will come. This is the theme, that the real healing is when we can be so touched by love that we're moved to share that love. We're so touched by the healing power of God the we're moved to extend that healing power of God. The gift we've been given, we now give as a gift.

So I think what Mark is already teaching us, in this very first chapter of this Gospel about discipleship, is that, to be a disciple, we must first encounter Jesus and his healing love and that empowers us to then reach out with that same love in offering service to others. I suspect another lesson, a corollary to that, is that we must first take care of ourselves if we are to then care for others and maybe the reason we don't care for others more is that we haven't cared enough, or taken care of, ourselves. That's the first scene. It's really something to just focus on and I encourage you to just picture that in your mind. Just take some time with that, as it were, zoom in with the lens of your own imagination, to imagine Simon Peter's mother-in-law and what she

Fr. Jim Willig Gospel Study - *Time Management*

would say to us. What would she share with us about what really happened to her as a result of this experience of the Lord's love?

Shift to the second scene. Keep in mind that the first exorcism took place in the synagogue and now this healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law—the scene shifts to the evening after sunset. They brought all who were ill and possessed by demons to Jesus. I quote, "the whole town was gathered at the door." Can you picture that? The whole town. You will appreciate this. In first century time, especially in a place like Palestine, there was no medicine derived from the scientific method. The best they had was home cures perhaps, but you can imagine that people would die from illnesses that we would think very common today; even a fever, or certainly an infection. Very commonly women would die in childbirth.

You can picture when somebody showed up who had amazing healing powers. Whoa! Everybody showed up. You get it? Everybody showed up and that's what we have here. Everybody in town heard what was going on and everybody had something wrong with them, right? How many of us feel some hurt or some pain somewhere. But back then this is incredible. The other interesting point I think is that when Jesus was working into the evening and after sunset Jesus was working overtime. You can appreciate this—at the time of Christ, after the sun went down, people basically called it a day. They didn't have any light but very small oil lamps. Jesus was working overtime.

When this whole town gathered outside, you can just imagine the expectation he must've felt on himself and the amazing demands that were made on his time and his energy and he responded in love. He cured many who were sick. He drove out many demons and not permitting them to speak because they knew him. It says, "He cured many who were sick." Don't you wonder, were there some he didn't heal? Don't you wonder?

It does seem odd. Why does God heal some, but not others? It is such a mystery, isn't it? I don't think that we can ever eclipse the mystery of God. I don't think we can ever explain the mystery away. Jesus truly heals many people but there are many he does not heal physically. That's what I'm coming understand. In his mind, the healing that takes place in the spirit—that is the soul of someone—is far more lasting. Right? In fact, think about it. Our bodies only last, how long? The psalmist says we shall live 70 or 80 years if we are strong. That's written 2,000 years ago. Maybe they would write 100 today, I don't know. Think about it, our souls will last forever and the irony is, that our very physical sickness has a curative effect on our souls. I know this for myself.

I have to say it, and others I've talked to who are also going through real suffering and sickness, it is our sickness, it is our suffering that purifies our soul; that heals so many things in us if we let it, if we invite it, if we learn the lessons, if we go and grow in the way that this is offering us. That's very hard to do obviously, but I'm suggesting that Jesus heals everybody and some even physically. I'm for the whole package deal, but I also think part of that healing takes place in our mind and our outlook. I think it's all connected too. I'm sure you've read this yourselves, that as our mind thinks so our body reacts. Our attitudes affect so much of the overall health and a lot of

Fr. Jim Willig Gospel Study - *Time Management*

disease takes place with the bad thinking, bad habits, bad lifestyle, that it all works together or works against each other; you know what I mean.

I think the deepest healing is in our heart and soul and that has a positive healing effect on our body and our mind. The more we can heal our mind of negativity or of whatever it is that gets us down, I think that really has a positive effect on our spirit and obviously our body as well.

Interestingly, all these people come to Jesus to be healed and he expels many demons. Remember that when I spoke of demons last week, I explained that "demons" was the generic diagnosis years ago. Whatever the sickness or disease, it was called a demon because these are pre-diagnostic days. They didn't have medicine as we know it—modern medicine—and so they just said it was a demon. It was an ill effect on them and the odd thing we're told here is that Jesus did not give them permission to speak. Now what is that about? The hint of it is because they *knew* him. What does that mean?

Throughout Mark's Gospel we're going to hear time and again that Jesus wanted to keep his identity a secret. Now why would he want to do that? It's because, if people knew that he was the Messiah—they had so many misconceptions about what the Messiah would be. The people were expecting this Messiah sent by God to save Israel, but their idea of someone who would save Israel was a strong military leader (or political leader) or someone who would be a great and wealthy person that would come with tremendous powers that would just save Israel in a moment and Jesus knew that his understanding of Messiah was diametrically opposed to that misconception and so we wanted to keep it quiet.

Another interesting thing in the Gospel is that whenever Jesus tried to tell people, "Don't say anything," they always said something. Then, when he finally told his disciples, "Go and share the good news!" They didn't do that immediately. This is a remarkable scene, the second scene of the Gospel. Just picture this, if Jesus were here and he started healing people, wow, and people would show up from all over.

Shift to the third scene. In the third scene we're told, Jesus rises early before dawn and he left and went off to the deserted place where he prayed. Well, you know the first thing that came to my mind is after he had spent such a tiring day and an exhaustive night you would think he would have slept in in the morning but he didn't. Instead he rose early, before dawn. Now most people in that day again called it a day after the sun went down and they started a new day when the sun rose; for obvious reasons. They operated on the light of the sun. So the fact that Jesus got up before the sun rose, suggests that he wanted to get up before others were up and about.

What I'd like to do here is to highlight what I would consider the when, where, why, and what of Jesus' prayer. The first I've already begun to explain. When did Jesus pray? I suspect that he would have prayed often at this time, before others got up and were about. Before the activity of the day would get underway. There's something about the early morning time to pray. I have found this so for myself, how about you? If you try to pray during the middle of the day, someone's gonna steal that time. It's not gonna work out so easily, but if you start before the day

Fr. Jim Willig Gospel Study - *Time Management*

gets really underway, and really things get busy, that's more of an interrupted time. That's what Jesus chose.

I imagine that was a habit, or as I say, the habitual ritual of Jesus. I picture him getting up at that time most every morning to pray. Where did he pray? Everything he mentions in this Gospel is with intention. He went to a deserted place; a deserted place. He sat in silence and solitude. He found the place where he could be alone with himself and alone with God. Don't we all need that? How many places can you even go where it's quiet, where you don't hear noise? We suffer in this society with noise pollution. How often do we ever hear silence? I was realizing this not long ago.

I was out in the country and we just stood quietly and the person I was with said, "Listen to that silence." What I was listening to is what he said, that silence. We don't often hear it and just look at the stars. Wow, it isn't until you go to the country away from all the other lights and you see the bright light of heaven. There's something about those places that are sacred sites. Where is that for you, where you can enter into silence and solitude to be alone with your thoughts and your feelings and your God?

Why does Jesus go off to pray? Perhaps this is stating the obvious but just to be sure we don't miss it, I suspect Jesus went there because he knew where his power came from and he knew—as we'll read later in another Gospel healing—that whenever he healed, power goes out of him. You know that from yourselves. When you give a lot of yourselves, you're depleted of energy. You're just exhausted like something goes out of you after you've done something well.

With Jesus especially, there is so much love that went into everything he did, so when he ministered to people all the love flowed through him and into these people. And so, he was on empty. Where was his filling station? He knew to come and be filled with the Spirit in prayer. He knew where to go to be replenished and renewed. He knew that prayer was his filling station with the father. He knew that that's where great power and grace and love filled him and he knew he needed it. You would think, 'Hey, Jesus is son of God, couldn't he get away with a few days without prayer?' He didn't think so and that's worth noting. Never should a day go by without our being really connected to Christ in prayer; really going to that place where we're fed and where we're fueled and filled. How does that happen? When does that happen? In what way does that happen for you? These are the questions we must ask ourselves as we find ourselves on this page of the Gospel.

The last question I would ask about Jesus' prayer is, what do you think he prayed? How do you think he prayed? I imagine that Jesus would have reflected back on what had happened that day. I imagine him thinking and praying to his father, 'Wow, that was really something that happened last night!' He must've been amazed himself, because remember, he was just beginning his ministry and he was unaccustomed to this supernatural power of healing people. He must have just begun to understand this sense of what God was wanting to accomplish through him. That was a most profound teaching for Jesus. I believe if we take time to reflect on the ways God works in our lives, we would begin to understand the tremendous mission we have in life too.

Fr. Jim Willig Gospel Study - *Time Management*

St. Ignatius of Loyola said, there are two most important prayers and these two prayers you should never let a day go by without praying this way. The first was the holy Eucharist, in which we receive Jesus and the second was what he called the Examination of Life [or simply, the Examen] where you think back on what happened in that day. As a friend said, just ask yourself at the end of today what are you most grateful for? Ask yourself that question before you jump into bed tonight. What are you most grateful for today? That tries to touch the touchstone of grace. By naming it, then we can claim it and make it part of our life you see and revisit it then. There are such great lessons every day we can learn, if only we take the time to learn them, reflect on them.

The second question is, and what are you least grateful for today? I have a hard time with that question because I don't like to go there, but I have found that's a very interesting question to raise because it touches those things that we did but wish we didn't do and we could then learn a lot from our own sins and mistakes and oversights. There's a lot of lessons there. Often times the greatest lessons are the hardest lessons we can learn each day. So, I imagine when Jesus went off to pray, he was praying about these lessons that had just happened; what lessons they were for him! Not only as he prayed about what happened the previous night, I imagine, he was thinking ahead about where this would be leading him now, this new day and these next few days ahead of him that week. I suspect that's what we need to do too. Not only do we look at our past days—What's the Lord teaching us these past few days?—but now that we have an idea what the Lord's been trying to teach us, doesn't that indicate what the Lord wants to do with us and for us and the time ahead of us?

It's interesting because some people come to me sometimes and say: 'Father I pray and I get so distracted.' I said, do you ever think about praying about your distractions? That sounds odd doesn't it? But pray about your distractions because they might make beautiful meditations. What I'm suggesting is the very thing that's coming into our life for some reason is coming into our mind maybe, it's because we need to give it some mental attention; maybe. For some reason it's coming and if you fight it, it'll just stick. But if you bring it to the Lord, maybe there is some reason for it all and some lesson there. I don't know, but I can only say I have found it to be so for myself.

At this time we could just imagine Jesus getting deeply into his silence and solitude and this prayerful contemplation when all of a sudden people like Simon Peter interrupted him saying, 'Hey Jesus! Everybody is looking for you.' People were obviously looking for Jesus because they saw him as a great miracle worker. Simon saw this as a tremendous opportunity for capitalizing on this public interest. He didn't want to let this go by, so he said, 'Come on Lord, we want to ride the tide of this popular demand that you're on now.' Jesus responds to this pressure of Peter by saying, 'No. Rather let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also for this purpose have I come.' Because he was saying 'Yes' to God the Father, he could then say 'No' to Simon Peter and all these other people.

You know a person can firmly say 'No' if they have a deeper 'Yes.' Jesus was very clear that he wasn't about just doing good things, he was about doing God's things. He was not about being

Fr. Jim Willig Gospel Study - *Time Management*

successful, he was about being faithful to his Father. Jesus didn't give in to the pressure to be successful because he had such intention to be faithful to the Father. We hear that in that great line: "For this purpose have I come." That's another way of saying, 'I bring the good news to all.'

Amazing. And so in the last line of this Gospel we're told that Jesus went into their synagogues preaching, driving out demons, all throughout the region of Galilee. This is the summary of Jesus' ministry—or what he believed was his main mission—and more than that, it's a statement that Jesus was faithful to what he believed was his top priority for which God led him to do. To bring the good news to all people, to preach and to expel demons. Amen.