

# **The Inclusive Community**

**March 1, 2009**

**Homily of Anthony T. Padovano**

**Temptation and Triumph**

**Mark 1:9-15**

**When a playwright or a film director brings a character on stage, an effort is made to have the character appear in a manner which reveals who the person is and what we can expect.**

**Mark brings Jesus on stage for the first time in these early verses of his first chapter. I find it striking that the first time we see Jesus, he has spent two months alone.**

**There is something mysterious about this person, something that will remain elusive even through the time of his public ministry.**

**Jesus leaves home in Nazareth to go to Jerusalem to see and hear John the Baptist. Nazareth is about 60 miles from Jerusalem, a 3 day walk at 20 miles a day. There is no indication of what he told his family and friends as he left. He needs a lot of time alone.**

**We do not see him in Nazareth or Galilee. Mark brings him to us at the river Jordan near Jerusalem. Jesus enters the river and is being baptized by John when first we meet him.**

**As Jesus is coming up out of the water, he sees the heavens torn apart and believes the Spirit of God has settled on him.**

**Any Jewish reader of the time would have gotten from this scene what we miss. It is coded, symbolic, resonating with Torah references.**

**The Spirit of God hovers like a dove over Jesus. This is a new creation of God, so significant, in Mark's view, that only the opening of Genesis when God's Spirit hovers over creation and makes it happen can capture it.**

**The Torah gives us another powerful creation moment when Israel is born as the Hebrew people come up out of the water of the sea in Exodus, no longer slaves but free.**

**So, Jesus, not yet having spoken a word, still alone, is a new creation of God and a new Israel.**

**The heavens are torn apart because some powerful communication is going on between Jesus and God. Mark presents Jesus as a new creation and a new Israel but not because Jesus chose this role but because God wanted Jesus for it.**

**It is a voice from heaven that first verbalizes the mission of Jesus. Jesus is a son, beloved, someone who has touched the heart of God who is pleased with him. God was delighted at creation in Genesis. It was good. God is delighted with this son of his, well pleased.**

**Jesus, silent and alone, has still not spoken. He comes up from the Jordan River, bewildered, stunned, disoriented. A Spirit drives him, “immediately” Mark says, into the wilderness. Alone. Silent. Sorting it out. Trying to get it right.**

**Jesus is there 40 days.**

**This tells us something of what his mission will be. The 40 days do not represent the 40 years of Israel’s wandering in the desert as we once thought. Jesus does not need to be identified with Israel this way. This identity happened as he came up out of the water. He is identified here with Moses who, in Exodus 34, spends 40 days on Mount Sinai alone with God, with only bread to eat. At the end of that time, he comes down from Sinai with the commandments and the covenant.**

**Jesus will come out of the desert and create new commandments and a new covenant as a new Moses.**

**Moses’ faith was tested on Mount Sinai. Jesus will be tested in the wilderness by Satan, wild beasts, terrible loneliness, sharp hunger. He will prove to be steadfast, courageous, committed. He is given a sign that the mission will bring tragedy, heartache, failure. His own heart and spirit will become a wilderness.**

**The sign is given. As he leaves the desert, he learns that John has been arrested. He was “handed over” to those who seize him in the Greek text of Mark, the same verb that will be used when Jesus is arrested. The shadow of the cross falls across the Jordan, Jerusalem and Jesus.**

**Jesus heads home two months after leaving. Galilee seems safer. But it is not. When he preaches there, Nazareth rejects him. And the ruler of Galilee is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who will take John from prison and have him beheaded.**

**The first words of Jesus that Mark has him say are these, in paraphrase:**

**“There is no time to waste. I do not have much time. Nor do you. I tell you, the kingdom of God has broken out among us, the heavens are torn apart and God is right next to you!”**

**God’s message and nearness tells us this. Change your mind and heart by repenting so that you do not miss God. You must see and hear God as I did in the Jordan. Now, God is telling all of you that you are the sons and daughters of God. God has come to give you**

**only good news. Do not miss it. Open your eyes and your ears and see the Spirit of God descending on you, finding you beloved, pleased with you.**

**It is simple. God loves you. It is what God is. It is who you are. Do not miss it. I am here to help you not miss it. If you miss it, you will break God's heart.**

**That's the way God is.**

**Come with me. Together we will make a kingdom for all of us. And we shall make God, not a Temple or a religion, not the Law or the commandments but God, we shall make God the center of this kingdom.**

**You and I are a new creation, a new Jerusalem, a new day, a second chance, a new start. We must not go back to the wilderness. I have come to bring you bread and water, bread from heaven, the water of salvation, a promised land, the wine and oil of healing and life. It is Lent only so that we can make Easter from it.**