

Today's gospel reading comes from Mark and is composed of four distinct scenes. The first is a healing story. *The healing occurs on the Sabbath, probably in the afternoon. It is a private event, witnessed presumably by only a few.* It can be classified as a healing story because it includes a *description of the illness, the healing itself, and the demonstration of the healing.* (1:29-31); The second is a summary of the healing and exorcism activities that Jesus did at sundown on the Sabbath (1:32-34); The third is the report of Jesus withdrawing alone to pray. *The fourth is a mild conflict between Simon and Jesus over what should be Jesus' next course of action* (1:36-39). The conflict occurred when the whole town showed up at Jesus' door and Simon pressured Jesus to heal them (Italics from Texts for Preaching, p. 140-142). Although the subject matter in each unit is different the four parts interpret one another. Together they authorize the leadership of Jesus and clarify his primary vocation as servant of God. In these verses you can find the two literary devices that characterize Mark's gospel. They are Jesus' command of secrecy, and the problem of misunderstanding among the disciples about who Jesus is and what He is doing.

Mark 1:29-39

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.

Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.

The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was. Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "let us go somewhere else—to the near by villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

### “Holy Indifference”

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where he prayed. Mark 1:35

Immediately after teaching with amazing authority in the synagogue the double edged sword of authorizing power cropped up in Jesus again. This time it presented within the context of his public ministry of healing people with bodily illness like Simon's mother in law and people with illness in their mind. That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases (Mark 1:32-34). After a full day of healing Jesus was acutely aware that the powerful presence of God at hand that he proclaimed was powerfully present in his hand. When he touched ill people they got well. Jesus knew that he made a difference and that he mattered in peoples lives. He knew of his magnetic and victorious power with people. He knew that his fame was spreading quickly, that his popularity was swelling, and that he was becoming an overnight success.

When the disciples put their heads together at the end of the day, their thoughts matched those of Jesus. Wow what a day! Successful program! Awesome healing ministry! We're on the cutting edge! We're out there making a

difference! We feel alive, powerful, and important! All was glorious and grand for Jesus' tiny band of followers until very early in the (next) morning while it was still dark, (when) Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where— he prayed. That's when Jesus shifted the make a difference roll they were on into another gear. When Simon greeted Jesus with the early morning news that, Everyone is looking for you! (i.e. let's get out there and give them what they want) Jesus replied: Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.

Jesus prayed in the dark and he prayed alone. After he did so he changed up the direction and focus of his work. Mark didn't provide any details about the early conversation that Jesus had with God but we can assume that it was a course altering prayer or prayer of vocational discernment. In this kind of prayer we pray for personal transformation. We pray for God to shape us into servant people and to guide us in our service for the Lord. This kind of prayer moves through the three basic elements of thanksgiving, confession and listening.

That morning when he gave thanks, Jesus probably thanked God for the gift of the new day and for the Almighty acts of healing accomplished by God the day before.

When he made confession it was probably about how the powers of temptation that he had battled with in the wilderness were cropping up again in his servant work. An anecdote from the World's Collection of Church Jokes (ed. Paul Miller, p. 134) reminded me that this confessional element is both a traditional and essential part of discernment prayers.

One day a boy and his grandparents came to visit a 150 year old historic Catholic church. As they toured the church, the grandfather explained the reason for some of the architectural and liturgical features, while the boy listened intently. Then they reached the confessional in the back. "I know what this is!" the boy enthused, "It's for time-out, right?" In his heart to heart prayer encounter it was the right time for Jesus to tell God about the powers that were tempting him to use God's healing powers to increase the power of his own name and his own fame.

Confessional time out during these times of making a difference is necessary because there is a fine line between succeeding in the service of the Lord and succeeding in service to oneself. When we do the work of the Lord are we doing it for God's sake or our own? Although it is a line that is hard to see when we cross over it ourselves we can often spot it when others do. The new rock star Vu just crossed over. Vu is the latest music winner of the American Idol TV show. He has become popular

overnight (good and cool thing). Although he has risen from the ranks like the others, he is the first Asian American to step outside the Harvard brains-analytical-high tech-wiz kid Asian stereotype (first of a kind) and drop his engineering training to pursue a music career (daring and innovative). In an NECN interview with him on Thursday he talked about what was next for him now that he has succeeded in reaching stardom. He said that his new focus will be on the promotion of his music and his name. His new direction will be all about the promotion of ---Vu. He told the music fans that they could link onto [Vudosoul.com](http://Vudosoul.com) for an up-date on his success. From the interview, it was clear that Vu's new move in his music career was the self centered one of increasing his fame and success and power of his magnetic style. The development of his own voice and unique music would be secondary to his goal of keeping his American Idol Number One spot.

When Jesus finished telling God what these tempting powers were like for him he probably next fell silent and listened for God. Soren Kierkegaard wrote that: *To pray does not mean to listen to oneself speaking. Prayer involves becoming silent and being silent and waiting until God is heard.* (Chandler Gilbert, *When I Open My Window*, in p.31) When Jesus listened for God's help in dealing with the pull to stay in town and heal everyone who needed him---because it would send his rating sky high-- I imagine that God helped him with wisdom of the kind that is embedded in the story,

**Men at Work.** *During the Middle Ages, a traveller once came upon a place in France where a great deal of building work was going on. He began talking with the stone cutters and asking them about their work. He approached the first worker and asked, 'What are you doing?' The man, very disgruntled, and obviously unhappy in his hard toil, replied, 'I'm cutting these huge boulders with the simplest of tools and putting them together in the way I've been told to do. I'm sweating in this heat and my back is hurting. What's more, I'm totally bored, and I wish I didn't have to do this hard and meaningless job.' The traveler moved on quickly to interview a second worker. He asked the same question: 'What are you doing?' The worker replied, 'Well, I have a wife and children at home so I come here every morning and I work these boulders into regular shapes, as I'm told to do. It gets repetitive sometimes, but it helps feed my family and that's all I want.' Somewhat encouraged, the traveler went on to a third worker, 'And what are you doing?' he asked. The third worker responded with shining eyes, as he pointed to the heavens, 'I'm building a cathedral!' Wisdom's power at work in the third worker was the understanding that he was working on a project bigger and more awesome than his own. (100 Wisdom Stories from Around the World by Margaret Silf, p. 16 source unknown).*

In the darkness of his early morning encounter with God, God graced Jesus with the spirit of Holy Indifference to powers that tempted him to stay a make a great name for

himself. When this self serving temptation engaged Jesus with the seductive words, Everyone is looking for you, it was the grace of Holy Indifference that allowed him to say NO to the pursuit of building his own name and his own fame. It was the gift of Holy Indifference that also shaped his power of vocation in the self sacrificing (denial of self) vulnerable way of the cross. Jesus replied, "let us go somewhere else-to the near by villages-so I can preach there also. That is why I have come. And it was the gift of Holy Indifference that kept Jesus on the servant of the Lord track . . . he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. All praise and thanks be to God.