

2 Advent B 2020 SML MK 1:1-8

Two weeks ago, the Feast of Christ the King was celebrated on the last Sunday of the Church year. The First Sunday of Advent is celebrated on the first day of the Church year. The first day of the calendar year is January 1st. The first day of the fiscal year is July 1st. The first day of the Church year is the First Sunday of Advent.

Along with the change in the Church year is also a change in the Lectionary, or the book from which the readings at Mass are taken. The Lectionary runs on a three year cycle and the most notable difference in the readings among each of the three years is the gospel. Last year, the gospel readings were taken from Matthew. Next year, the gospel readings will be taken from Luke. This year, the gospel readings are taken from Mark. So providing background on the Gospel of Mark is in order.

This evening's/morning's gospel begins with: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The gospel literally begins with this verse from sacred scripture because Mark wrote his gospel first. Most have the misunderstanding that Matthew wrote his gospel first because

the canon or the list of the books of the Bible order the four gospels as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Wrong. Scripture scholars are certain Mark wrote his Gospel first.

Scripture scholars have narrowed the date of Mark's gospel between the years 64 and 70 AD. In 64 AD was persecution of Nero, which the gospel mentions:

Watch (hold on to that word, "**Watch!**") out for yourselves. They will hand you over to the courts. You will be beaten in synagogues. You will be arraigned before governors and kings because of me, as a witness before them. But the gospel must first be preached to all nations. When they lead you away and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say. But say whatever will be given to you at that hour. For it will not be you who are speaking but the Holy Spirit. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved. (13:9-13)

In 70 AD was the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which Mark's gospel does not mention, however Matthew alludes to the destruction of the Temple in his 24th chapter.

Now you have heard it a few times since I arrived at St. Mary of the Lakes that Matthew wrote his gospel to hard core, inner circle Jews. Hence, Matthew catered his message to a

very Jewish audience, making heavy use of Jewish customs and feasts, quoting the Hebrew scripture constantly, describing Jesus as another Moses.

Mark, on the other hand, wrote his gospel to a Roman Church quite unfamiliar with Judaism, quite unfamiliar, therefore, with the religion in which Jesus was raised. Matthew, writing to Jews, assumed his audience enjoyed a certain familiarity with Jewish customs. Mark, on the other hand, needed to explain them:

Now when the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around with Jesus, , they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. MARK ADDS THE FOLLOWING: (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels.) 7:3-4

Also note Mark is not an apostle. Of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, only two are apostles: Matthew and John. Mark and Luke are not. If Mark was not an Apostle, the obvious question is, “From whom does Mark get his information?”

The Church Fathers have long been in agreement on the

following three points:

1. Mark was not a hearer or an eye witness follower of our Blessed Lord.
2. Mark received his teaching from the Apostle Peter
3. As did all four evangelists, Mark adapted Peter's teaching to the needs of his hearers; in Mark's case, a Roman Church very unfamiliar with Judaism, very unfamiliar with Jesus.

Finally, Mark's gospel is filled with a sense of urgency:

1. The Gospel of Mark recounts what Jesus did in a vivid style, where one incident directly follows upon another. In this almost breathless gospel account, Mark stresses Jesus' message about the kingdom breaking now, breaking immediately.
2. "*kai ethus,*" - **immediately!** Thirty-three times in the Gospel of Mark is the word "**immediately**" used.
3. In addition is Mark's use of "**Watch:**" Look at last Sunday's gospel: Be **watchful!** You do not know when the time will come; **Watch** therefore, you do not know when the Lord will come . . . **Watch!**" At the agony in the garden, "My soul is sorrowful, even unto death. Remain here and **watch!**"

Mark's sense of urgency is right on the mark. Think about Advent. Advent is four weeks long and Advent has a twofold focus:

1. During the first and second weeks of Advent, the Church will focus on the second coming of Christ, at a time, says

Mark, that no one knows: not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. (13:32)

2. Notice the third candle is pink, to emphasize and change in focus. During the third and fourth weeks of Advent, the Church will focus on the first coming of Christ, when the “Word became flesh,” in Bethlehem in Judea.

During Advent, the Church makes present the ancient expectancy of the Messiah by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior’s first coming, celebrated at Christmas. But you miss half the point of Advent if you only prepare for Christmas. This Advent, also prepare your hearts for Christ’s second coming, because for all you know, compared to Christmas, Christ’s Second Coming might come first. So you see, Mark’s sense of urgency is right “on the mark.”