

Homily on Mark 3:20-34

June 13, 2018

Intro: We are now almost half way through the calendar year, but a little less than a third of the way through Ordinary time. This is because the Lenten and Easter seasons' own readings have postponed the sequence of ordinary time. And so we are only now getting to a fourth of the way through the gospel of Mark, which we will now continue until Advent next fall.

Today's gospel has a much disputed issue: what is the sin against the Holy Spirit? Scripture scholars, systematic theologians, moral theologians and others have investigated and there is no consensus about what is the sin against the Holy Spirit mentioned in today's gospel. Nevertheless, I am going to take a swing at this knuckleball.

Some background: Already at the beginning of Mark, Jesus has exorcised a demon, worked so many healings that he had no rest, and cleansed a leper. When he healed a paralytic the scribes appeared and began to object. The scribes and Pharisees objected to his eating with sinners and non-observance of their narrow rules of fasting and Sabbath observance. They especially objected to his healing on the Sabbath, which they took as work.

In today's gospel it appears that his extended family thinks Jesus is crazy, but the scribes think he is possessed by the devil, and with the devil's power he casts out demons. Jesus points out the contradiction involved in this accusation. If demons opposed other demons, then their divided kingdom will destroy itself. He goes on to say, "Amen I say to you, all sins and blasphemies that people utter will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an everlasting sin." Mark then adds, "For they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit'."

Basically, Jesus says that it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus casts out demons, and the scribes' refusal to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit is blasphemy against the power of that Spirit in Jesus.

So the question for us is, "How do the Pharisees and scribes fail to recognize the clear work of the Holy Spirit? The crowds can see it and are amazed, but the Pharisees cannot. It is simple: they have a mindset which makes them unable to see what they are clearly witnessing. If it does not fit exactly with their view of legal spirituality, they refuse to acknowledge any other reality. It is the Pharisaic mindset that leads to their blasphemy.

The Meaning for us:

We all have mindsets which keep us from observing the truth of the reality right before us. In so doing, we are often missing the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Many of us are victims of racial prejudice. We know that Americans for centuries ignored the manifest humanity of black slaves. But many of us still today are afraid of black folks, dislike their music and culture, and refuse to see the manifest goodness in black culture and black people. In so doing, we are usually missing the work of the Holy Spirit.

Many Catholics are victims of gender bias. We exclude from our society gay and lesbians. Often they manifest the fruits of the Holy Spirit in their lives---their concern for justice everywhere, their charity towards the vulnerable, their Christian faith, hope, and love. In short, we ignore their living of Jesus' values at a deeper level than many straight people. When we are blind to their integrity and holiness we are ignoring the work

of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This is a sin against the Holy Spirit.

There is a widespread *class bias* in our country. We honor those who have worked hard and made a lot of money, but we ignore many who are one step from homelessness who are doing the best they can to avoid eviction even when both partners are working full time. And we do not know the basic goodness of those who, through no fault of their own, are homeless. This too is a sin against the Holy Spirit.

We are torn by *political bias* so that Democrats think that nothing a Republican can do can be good, and Republicans who think that nothing the Democrats can do is good. Our refusal to dialogue honestly with one another is not attending to the deeper values that each side holds. It is a blindness that keeps us from Christ's healing of our nation. Vs. the Holy Spirit.

And we have a *national bias* that says that only our evolved form of democracy is suitable for countries which need other governmental and economic systems. This bias is perhaps the best interpretation of "America First," but it is also a refusal to see the Holy Spirit at work in countries other than our own.

All of us have our own version of these biases and we have prejudices which are purely our own. In so doing we turn blind eyes to the work of the Holy Spirit in all that God has created and in which God is present. It is our sin against the Holy Spirit. Mostly these mindsets were given to us by family and our culture. I presume that if we acknowledge these biases and ask for forgiveness, God will give it. But if we close our eyes and hearts, this may well be the sin against the Holy Spirit for which there can be no forgiveness.

So, ask God for conversion--- to open our eyes and ears to where God is present and where we have not expected that presence. Ask for the vision of the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins:

*I say móre: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is –
Christ – for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.*