

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B: July 7, 2023

“And they took offense at Him...”

If you'll pardon the expression, we have had quite a ride with Our Lord and the Apostles in the Gospel of St. Mark. After having celebrated the feasts in Ordinary Time, that is, the Feasts of the Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi, we set out with Jesus over the Sea of Galilee, literally in a hurricane two Sundays ago, and then, last Sunday, we were, quite literally with Our Lord in a hurricane of activity, when Jesus arrived on shore to heal Jairus' daughter and the woman who had been afflicted with a haemorrhage for twelve years. All around Jesus there seemed to be a veritable storm of activity, while He remained, at all times, rather the serene eye of a storm of glory, healing, teaching, exhorting, being to those around Him whatsoever they needed Him to be. And after all of this, and after all of His miracles so lavishly given... what do we find in today's Gospel?

Contradiction. Are we surprised? *“This Child is destined to be the downfall and rise of many in Israel – a sign of contradiction...”* (St. Luke 2. 34) said Simeon to His Mother, Mary. Today we see the prophecy once again coming true, and by His very own... *“He came unto His own, and His own knew Him not!”* (St. John 1. 11) The words of the Gospel, seen and heard in the context of the last few weeks crack like the sound of a whip:

“Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given Him? What mighty deeds are wrought by His hands? Is He not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” **And they took offense at Him.** (St. Mark 6. 2-4, *emphasis my own*)

“And they took offense at Him.” The older translation of the New American Bible read: “They found Him too much for them.”

Question! What about you and me? *Do we take offense at Jesus? Is He, at least sometimes, too much for us?* How do we know if Jesus is too much for us, if we take offense at Him?

C. S. Lewis offers some wonderful ideas in his little book *Mere Christianity*. Originally offered in a set a radio broadcasts beginning in the year 1943 in England to shore up the psychological and religious morale of the British people, Lewis later offered the three sets of talks in written form under the above title. In one of his talks he offers a magnificent, simple, cogent argument about the person of Jesus Christ that I should like to hand on to you. The kernel of Lewis' argument is simply this: Jesus is either a lunatic, a liar, or, very simply, He is Who He says He is. Pure and simple. You will indulge the rather long quotation, but it is necessary to make sure that we get the entire gist of Lewis' argument.

Then comes the real shock. Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time. Now let us get this clear. Among Pantheists, like the Indians, anyone might say that he was a part of God, or one with God: there would be nothing odd about it. But this man, since He was a Jew, could not mean that kind of God. God in their language, meant the Being outside the world Who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else. And when you have grasped that, you will see that what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips.

One part of the claim tends to slip past us unnoticed because we have heard it so often that we no longer see what it amounts to. I mean the claim to forgive sins: any sins. Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offences against himself. You tread on my toe and I forgive you, you steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men's toes and stealing other men's money? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give of his conduct... He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the party chiefly offended in all offenses. This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. In the mouth of any speaker who is not

God, these words would imply what I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivaled by any other character in history.

Christ says that He is 'humble and meek' and we believe Him; not noticing that, if He were merely a man, humility and meekness are the very last characteristics we could attribute to some of His sayings.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (1)

Lewis is at his best in the heat of argument, as the fighter, the *raconteur*: Here is the simple logic – figure it out – Jesus is either a madman parading around making wild claims and therefore not responsible for the words He is saying; Jesus is something far worse – “the Devil in Hell” – and therefore completely responsible for what He says, and, with His compelling words and His winning (though *lying!*) ways, dragging us all to hell; or, Jesus IS Who and What He says He IS – there are no other logical alternatives.

And if Jesus IS Who and What He says He IS... then the horizon of our reality begins to take on a rather different look, does it not? That would mean that His words are quite simply... the Truth. That would mean that the Church that He founded is quite simply... the True Church. And that would mean (Heaven forbid) we would have to put ourselves in the rather uncomfortable position of the poor, unfortunate speakers in the Gospel, today? Why, you ask? How does that follow? Because the Word of the Gospel is eternal and for all time.

This means, we have to ask ourselves... do we take offense at Jesus in our lives? Do we take offense at His Church or at Her teachings? These questions must be asked.

Some time ago Deacon Mike observed, quite rightly, that the old Roman Empire did not perish because of a lack of money or military might. It perished because of a profound failure of morality. This really ought to give us pause today, this week-end, as we celebrate our own nation's founding, and its founding upon Judeo-Christian principles. And, if we take this Gospel seriously along with the words of the great C. S. Lewis, perhaps we might want to question the wisdom of the direction our country, and, Heaven forbid, even some in the Church, seem to want to pursue.

If Jesus is Who and What He said He is, can anyone, any Court, really “re-define” the meaning of Holy Matrimony? Does anyone really have that power or freedom? If we as a people can re-define words, concepts, principles, etc., to whatever our whim or fancy is at the moment, do we not in fact risk losing the meaning of all words? If we believe that *Jesus IS the Word... In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God (St. John 1.1.)* ought we not pause to see where our “new definitions” might lead us? And, finally, in our rush to “re-do” words, and ultimately, the Word, might it not be asked if we, like the Nazarenes of old, are finding Jesus too much for us, that we are *offended by Him and His Church?*

Perhaps it might be a good thing to hear the Lord speaking through good St. Peter to each and every one of us: “*Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?*” ‘Yes, Lord, You know that I love You!’”(St. John 21. 15) Lord Jesus, through the power of the highest Angels, the Seraphim, burning with love for You, help me to love You more and more. And through the power of the Cherubim, help us to know You, Who are Pure Truth, more and more each day. And, knowing You and loving You, more and more each day, let me never offend You... and, let me never take offense at You!